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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

"TROOPING WITH CROWS"

BY

C. L. PIRKIS

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FROM HER HOME," ETC. ETC.



London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

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"TROOPING WITH CROWS."

CHAPTER I.

IN THE NEST.

BURIED among the Welsh mountains it was—an old grey stone two-storied house, running into towers, and odd gables, and queer old-fashioned out-buildings with three-cornered windows and five-cornered doors. "The Eyrie" it was called in the liquid unpronounceable language of the district, and it seemed a not inappropriate title when looked at from the low-lying glen at the foot of the brown rugged mountains which shut in this quiet little homestead. For a homestead it was in every sense of the word; one need but cross the somewhat weedy lawn, where wild birds of all sorts and sizes, and squirrels also, loved to congregate, and enter the drawing-room by one of the long narrow French windows, to find tokens of comfort and refinement and a lady's ruling hand in every nook and corner. An Erard's

grand piano, a harp, an easel in a good northern light, a sculptured group in pure marble, and a delicately-painted medallion on the walls, were the first things that met the eye. But hidden away in corners were greater treasures still: old and priceless books in the deep shelves of the library, rare prints and engravings in the capacious portfolios, and, hanging on the walls of the large central hall, were pictures which Owen Tremarten had spent a lifetime and a fortune in tracing out and purchasing. This hall was the favourite resort of the master of the house, and here stood in a deep recess his daughter's favourite instrument, a magnificent deep-toned organ. Hour after hour would he pass here wandering among his pictures and listening to dreamy fugue or sonata, or some wild triumphal march which would come springing from under his daughter's slight yet firm fingers. Perhaps as he sauntered up and down in the dim twilight or golden summer's afternoon the bright fresh maiden of eighteen would fade into the image of the girl-mother laid so many years ago in her early grave, and his own romance of love and passion would be lived through once more—who can tell?

But now in this early spring morning the

hall stands wide open and empty. Lettice Tremarten has too keen an appreciation of fresh air and sweet sights and sounds not to be among them when they are at their best. Besides, has she not a whole colony of friends and neighbours (feathered and otherwise) dependent upon her? There on the lawn in the very midst of them all she stands—a slight tall figure with a small head crowned with a mass of curly, wavy brown hair—hair which never could be reduced to order and submission, and which had a trick of defying hairpins and ribbons, and would tumble over the girl's eyes whenever she turned up her face to meet yours, as she was rather fond of doing at times, or it would tumble the other way and hang like a thick veil over neck and shoulders as she stooped to gather the flowers for her fresh morning's vases, or to feed the fat lazy blackbirds and robins which came trooping and twittering from all corners at her approach.

That is what they are doing at the present moment, and the lawn, kept wild and untrimmed by Miss Lettice's own orders, "because the squirrels like something rough and tangly under their little toes," is literally alive with life and sound. The robins have

ventured the nearest to her neat little garden-boots, and in close proximity to them balances itself a lame barndoor fowl, whose broken leg Lettice herself had bound up and mended, and who was consequently a special favourite, although for laying purposes absolutely useless. Behind these cluster and flutter a varied collection of wild singing-birds, linnets, thrushes, yellowhammers, and finches. Even tomtit leaves his pecking and insect-hunting on the down-side of the sycamore, and joins the twittering throng.

Into the very midst of them dashes old Brownie, Lettice's curly retriever, scattering the little pensioners right and left with a heavy bark, intended, no doubt, for a ponderous "good-morning." "Down, Brownie, how dare you!" scolds Lettice, placing one little foot on old Brownie's well-furred neck to enforce obedience. Then the crumb-scattering goes on for another ten minutes or so, Lettice amusing herself by making her feathered friends fly hither and thither for her favours, and throwing the last morsel at a chattering magpie, perched on the low bough of a mountain ash, who had somehow, so she judged, through timidity or cowardice, failed to secure for himself a proper portion.

Then she turns her basket upside down.

"They won't believe it's all gone, Brownie," she says, releasing the dog, "till they see it bottom upwards." The sunlight glances and quivers through the aspens and alders which skirt the lawn; behind them babbles and tumbles a narrow running brook, while the semicircle of the mountains in the distance forms a glorious background to the picture. The barndoor fowl cackles and flutters on to Lettice's shoulder, and is very quickly fluttered off again with a reprimand from the young lady. Brownie released disperses the tiny feathered tribe in all directions, and finally starts off in full pursuit of a mischievous-looking squirrel, who, after a few bounds and gambols, ensconces himself in safety in a tall horse-chestnut, and curls up his tail in defiance at the dog's vain efforts to dislodge him.

Lettice's eyes sparkle with delight—some said those eyes of hers were blue, some said they were grey, some hazel; anyhow, they were large, and changeful, and brilliant—her pretty little mouth breaks into all sorts of pleasant smiles, and she nods her head at the blue hills now catching wonderful lights and shadows as the sun mounts higher in the heavens.

"Oh, you dear little kids and goats up

there!" she exclaims; "I'll have some of you down here before long."

Of course she cannot see the "dear little kids and goats," but she knows that half-way up the mountains there is fair pasturage for them, and no doubt at this very moment they are enjoying it, and she may just as well talk to them as to any other creature.

Then for a few minutes she stands still and enjoys the freshness and beauty of the morning scene. All around her the earth seems full of sunlight and colour and song, the tangled verdure on the lawn never seemed greener nor fresher; surely the little brook never babbled so prettily before, and those delicious lilacs and violets never before gave out so lovely a perfume. She stoops to gather a few hyacinths for her waistbelt; Brownie picks up the empty basket, and stands patiently waiting for further orders. Lettice gives one upward farewell look at the blue hills, and something of sadness and longing passes over her face.

"Yes, you dear old mountains," she says aloud, "I have known and loved you a long time, but for all that I should like to see a little of what is going on on the other side of you."

At this moment the sound of wheels is

heard on the drive running round the house, as the coachman, throwing back the stable-door, brings out the pony phaeton for the day.

Lettice bounds forward to pat her favourite ponies and rub their "dear little noses." An elderly gentleman comes down the front steps, followed by two elderly ladies, one tall and stout and the other tall and thin. Both are dressed in the latest London fashion.

"Lettice, I am driving your aunts into the village; will you come?" inquires the gentleman.

The tall stout lady interposes—

"Not in that dress, may I beg, Lettice. Dear me! each time I pay you a visit here you seem to me to be more unsophisticated and untidy than before. Owen, Owen, that girl sadly wants pruning and training!"

Lettice flushes a little and laughs a little.

"I hadn't the least intention of going into the village this morning, Aunt Rosamond," she replies; "I have so very much to do."

The tall thin lady, who is emotional in temperament and active in disposition, begins now.

"I suppose 'so very much to do,' Lettice,

means dawdling about the whole morning with a paintbrush in your hand and spoiling two or three sheets of good cardboard." Then as the fresh spring breeze catches Lettice's brown hair, and the aforesaid brown hair, in response to a somewhat impatient toss of the head from the young girl, tumbles *en masse* to her waist, the lady exclaims, "I wonder—I wonder what would they say to you in a London drawing-room!"

Lettice finishes rubbing the pony's nose.

"Dear old Fiddle!" she says, giving him a farewell pat. She goes to the other pony and repeats the operation, ending with a "Dear old Falstaff!" Then she looks up at her aunts. "Aunt Judith! Aunt Rosamond!" she exclaims, "I wish, instead of scolding me so much, you would take me back to London with you, and prune and train me there." Here a start of surprise from papa. Lettice turns on him. "Yes, papa dear, I would really like to go up just for one short season and see what they would say to me in a London drawing-room. I wouldn't stay a day after, and then I'd come back and settle down here for ever and ever."

Papa touches up Fiddle and Falstaff impatiently with his whip.

"Go in, pussy," he says, "and don't talk nonsense."

Lettice throws him a kiss and a bright smile. Aunt Rosamond begins *sotto voce*, but has to raise her voice above the crunching of the wheels on the gravel and the ring of the ponies' hoofs, and Lettice hears her say distinctly, "The child is quite right, Owen. It is your duty to give her a season in London—it is high time——" But the rest of the sentence is lost to her as the phaeton whirls into the flinty high road.

And Lettice stands silent and pensive in front of the long drawing-room windows. Shall she go in and have a quiet morning's sketching, or bend her back over her embroidery frame, or wander away with Brownie to the clear lake into which falls the little babbling brook, and give him a good half-hour's splashing and washing, or shall she—— But here her speculations and plannings are suddenly brought to a close by a quaintly-dressed stooping old figure with a basket of tools, who comes up from a side walk and salutes her with a respectful "Good-morning, Miss Lettice, and what orders for the day, if you please?"

Lettice looks up vexed at having her

meditations interrupted. "Oh, Roberts!" she exclaims, recognising the head gardener. "Orders? Oh, dear, no! I never give any when you startle me in this way—just when I am so busy thinking." The old man begins to apologise. "No, don't do that, only don't bother me again." The old man touches his hat and turns to go away. "Oh, stay, Roberts, I forgot," exclaims the young lady. "I have one very particular order to give. There is a quantity of chickweed and groundsel growing up in the violet-beds. On no account have it weeded out—not the least morsel of it—my canaries are quite pining for some. Now don't grumble, Roberts, but go away as fast as you can, and leave me to finish my thinking."

Her "thinking," however, seems doomed not to be finished this morning, for she hears the iron gate leading from the high road swing back and a firm quick footstep on the gravel.

What is the matter with Brownie's collar that at this particular moment Lettice must stoop down and adjust it so carefully with both hands? Brownie wags his tail gratefully, still keeping firm hold of his mistress's basket. A kind frank voice at Lettice's side wishes her "Good morning" and extends a

hand towards her. Lettice looking up, and returning the "Good morning" in somewhat demure tones, sees a tall well-made young man of about eight-and-twenty or thirty—a man with no particular beauty in face or figure, but with kindly frank blue eyes which say, as plainly as words can speak, "I am doing my duty honestly and well, and there is nothing in this world worth the trouble of a lie."

Lettice does not take the offered hand; she is still (on her knees now) busy manipulating Brownie's collar.

"Brownie's curls are too long, Dr. Herron," she begins apologetically; "they almost hide his new collar; I think I must cut them off; he is looking quite effeminate."

"Can I be of any service, Miss Tremarten?" asks the doctor, entering into the spirit of the thing, and he too goes down on his knees and commences fumbling about Brownie's curls, and then somehow their eyes meet, and Lettice's flash and then droop, and then somehow their hands get very close together, and then Lettice jumps up flushing and shy and yet intent on fun.

"Dr. Herron," she begins, "I have such glorious news to tell you—I mean I would have told you if every one hadn't been out

and if you could have come into the house for half-an-hour's chat."

"This is the very place for glorious news," says the doctor brightly, looking round at the pretty garden scene and the lovely mountain picture beyond, and then letting his gaze rest upon the sweet dimpling face in front of him.

"Oh, I can't stay out here a moment longer," exclaims Lettice, "I have such a world of things waiting for me indoors, so the good news must keep for another time," and she makes a little movement towards the house.

"And I too," says the doctor, again rising to the occasion, "have a world of things waiting for me—not indoors but out—and can only give you three minutes, Miss Tremarten, to hand over your list of sick poor people to be seen after, for I'm off for a long ride."

Lettice is piqued, and determines to take good aim this time. "Oh, I can't think about the poor people this morning," she says, again adjusting Brownie's collar; "they must find some one else to look after them now, for I'm going back with Aunt Rosamond to London for the season."

"To London!" echoes the doctor in blank

amazement, and Lettice, with her hair rippling over her eyes, enjoys his surprise. "To London, Miss Tremarten! Do you really mean to tell me that your father has given his consent to your going?"

"Oh no," replies Lettice blithely, "no one has given any consent at present, for," she adds slyly, "it hasn't been asked; but of course I am going, because I have arranged it all in my own mind, and whatever I arrange always does happen."

Dr. Herron stands a long three minutes silent and thoughtful. Lettice, intolerant of silence and thought in other people, however much she may like to indulge in both herself, commences a long lecture to Brownie on the "disgraceful manner in which he has conducted himself towards the rabbits and squirrels of late." Brownie, all respect and submission, elevates one ear and lowers the other as the discourse goes on.

"Miss Tremarten," says the doctor at length, drawing a full breath, "will you put aside fun for a little while and let me have a quiet five minutes' talk with you? I have sometimes thought that such a contingency as this might arise, but certainly was not prepared to meet it so soon."

"I can't stay another minute," interrupts

Lettice positively. "Are you coming in for a game of chess with papa to-night? Good-bye," and she holds out her hand.

The doctor takes the hand and keeps it.

"Lettice," he exclaims, "you know perfectly well what I have to say to you."

Lettice looks down demurely.

"I haven't the slightest idea, Dr. Herron——"

"Now, do you mean to tell me," he says in low earnest tones, and still retaining his hold on her hand, "that you have forgotten all about the letter I sent to you a short time ago, and which you have never condescended to answer?"

Lettice is flushing and nervous now, but still puts a brave face on the matter.

"Oh no, *I*"—with marked emphasis—"haven't forgotten it, but I thought *you* had."

"What could make you imagine such a thing?" asks the doctor in downright sober earnest.

"Because," and here by a dexterous movement she releases her hand, "you never spoke about it after you had sent it, and I naturally thought you had forgotten it."

Dr. Herron bites his lip to keep back his own smiles now.

"Will you never give over fun and teasing, Lettice?" he says. "But now you can answer me—one little word will do," and again somehow he gets possession of the hand, and his face is very close to hers.

Lettice looks down on the gravel-path, unconquered still.

"Please let me go, Dr. Herron. Let it be till I return from London. I couldn't tie you down with any promises, you know. I'm quite sure you will have altered your mind by the time I come back, and I'll really take your letter up to town with me, and—and—and"—here she hesitates and stumbles and picks herself up again, shakes her hair over her eyes, and compels the doctor to release her hand so that she may fasten it back again, and then looking a little sideways at him, completes her sentence—"and take great, great care of it. Good-bye, Dr. Herron." And she is gone.

And Dr. Herron, looking after her as she flutters across the sunlit lawn and disappears under the grey stone portico of the old house, wonders whether in any corner under heaven there ever existed, or could exist, so sweet and fascinating, and withal so wilful and untamed, a being as Lettice Tremarten.

CHAPTER II.

AMONG CROWS.

As Lettice anticipated, she had little or no difficulty in persuading her father that at least one season in London was an absolute necessity in every girl's life.

"You know, dear," she exclaimed, when "talking the matter over" with him, "I feel quite ashamed when I have to tell people I have never seen the parks nor been to the Opera, nor, what is worst of all, kissed the Queen's hand. It is really quite too dreadful. And Marian Goodlake, when she came over from Aberystwith on her wedding tour, said 'I had grown to look quite rustic.' And Aunt Rosamond, every time she comes, tells me I am 'so unsophisticated.' And you know, papa, that means a great deal. Don't you remember you called Betsy Williams 'unsophisticated' the other day when she went up to London to receive the twenty pound legacy that had been left to her, and she took the lawyer's cheque to Drummond's and told one of the clerks that she 'didn't want to inconvenience him by taking

so much money at once, but she'd have a little at a time as it suited him?' And some day, papa, I shall be doing something like that, and then you'll be ashamed of me and be very, very sorry that you didn't let me go to London with Aunt Rosamond."

Lettice paused for breath. Papa smiled.

"I suppose, pussy, it must be," he said. "I knew some day you'd have to go, but I didn't think 'some day' was so near at hand. In fact, you seemed to me still a child in short petticoats till the other day I was startled out of my belief by Dr. Herron——"

"There is that dreadful Brownie after the squirrels again," interrupted Lettice, and, utterly regardless of Aunt Judith's neuralgia, she flung back the drawing-room window and started in full pursuit of the dog.

Mr. Tremarten quietly got up and closed it after her.

"Who is this Dr. Herron that we see and hear so much of?" asked Aunt Rosamond as Lettice disappeared among the shrubs and brushwood.

"He is the son of that Colonel Herron who died in Burmah some ten years ago," replied Mr. Tremarten. "His uncle, Sir Wilfrid Herron, of Herron Court, in Nor-

thampton, is the head of the family, and in due course the title and estates must descend to our friend the doctor here. Sir Wilfrid, however, has never shown the least kindness towards his brother's children—their mother jilted him in early life, I believe. Colonel Herron somehow managed to run through whatever fortune he and his wife had, and our Dr. John prefers working at a profession he has always liked, to support himself and sister, instead of hanging about doing nothing and waiting for dead men's shoes. An eccentric individual, no doubt, he seems to you, Rosamond," he added after a pause.

"Not half so eccentric an individual as you seem to me, Owen," retorted the sister. "The want of common sense you have shown in the bringing up of that daughter of yours is to me marvellous. Not content with burying her for the first eighteen years of her life in absolutely conventual seclusion, with birds, and dogs, and horses as her sole companions, you throw her into the society of an attractive—yes, certainly attractive—but most ineligible bachelor, and what do you expect will come of it, let me ask you?"

Owen winced a little at this allusion to the secluded life he had chosen to lead ever

since the death of his young wife within a year of their marriage. However, he replied calmly enough—

“Something has come of it already, Rosamond, at least as far as the doctor is concerned, for about a month since he applied to me for permission to make Lettice an offer of marriage, and I told him he had my best wishes for his success.”

Aunt Rosamond flushed crimson with anger.

“Now, Judith, did you ever hear of such a piece of folly?” she exclaimed, turning to her sister. “Owen, do you really know what you are doing? Have you so low an opinion of your daughter’s attractions and her position in society that you think a country doctor, living absolutely from hand to mouth, a suitable husband for her? Don’t talk to me about his prospects,” she added, as she saw her brother about to speak; “I know people who know Sir Wilfrid well, and he is as likely as not to live for another twenty years. Do, I beg of you, let the girl have a chance; at any rate, don’t tie her down to a husband before she knows her own mind and what better things life has to offer her.”

Aunt Rosamond is in a high state of fer-

mentation now. Her lips compress as she finishes speaking, her aquiline nose rises higher and higher, and one foot commences beating a rapid tattoo on the footstool.

Aunt Judith, who has an immense belief in her sister's superior wisdom, and an intense love for her, interposed now.

"Owen," she exclaimed, in her usual high-pitched, sharp tones, "I am quite sure Rosamond will be ill if you continue to excite her in this way."

"I really don't see anything to excite her in the subject we are discussing," replied Owen in mild astonishment. "I have not the slightest wish to hurry my little girl into a marriage of any sort, and I am quite willing she should spend a year, or two if you wish it, with you both in London, and see as many men as you please. Honestly speaking, if I must have a son-in-law I prefer John Herron to any man I have ever known, but I'm not at all sure that Lettice's mind is made up one way or another."

Thus it was all settled eventually according to Aunt Rosamond's wishes, and, with many injunctions to papa not to be dull while she was away, and to the doctor and the doctor's sister, Mary Herron, to come up every day to the house to "keep

papa cheerful," Lettice started for London and plunged headlong into the gaieties and dissipation which opened before her dazzled eyes.

"Everything is lovely here," she wrote to her father about two months after her arrival in London, after she had been to her first drawing-room, danced at a royal duchess's ball, and been by common consent pronounced the *débutante* of the season. "It is quite too delicious, and if you would only leave your pictures and books for a few weeks and come here to go out with me I should have nothing in the world to wish for. Every one is *so* nice, and I do nothing but enjoy myself from morning till night. I get a glorious canter in the parks every morning. Then there are pictures to be seen or shopping to be done (such wonderful shops too, papa). Always two or three nice people come in to lunch. Then there are calls innumerable to be made afterwards; then a dinner, to be followed by two, or sometimes three, dances. And that is where my troubles begin. Aunt Rosamond will insist on dragging me home by midnight. Isn't it too bad of her? Just when everything is at the very best, and I have thoroughly entered into the fun of the thing, she puts on that

funny frown of hers and looks at the door, and then I know that unless I throw up all the rest of my partners and smile sweetly and say, 'I'm quite ready, Aunt Rosamond,' I shall be well scolded all the way home, and Aunt Judy will chime in every other minute with 'It's quite true, Rosamond. Lettice, how can you persist in exciting and worrying your aunt in this way?' and poor little me shrinks into the corner of the carriage and doesn't dare open her mouth."

Then followed a long list of inquiries about the dumb pets and favourites, among which Brownie and the lame barndoor fowl reigned supreme, and a wonder whether Dr. Herron came in for his nightly game of chess, and whether Mary ever played to papa some of those dear old fugues in the twilight. Finally came a short postscript:—

"Among other nice people I have met frequently a Captain Ivie M'Cormack and his sister Lilla (Elizabeth really). He (Captain Ivie that is) says he was at Rugby with Dr. Herron, and remembers him perfectly. Also there is a most irreproachable earl, a great agriculturist, a splendid cattle-breeder, and an enthusiast on all matters connected with trades-unions and strikes. Can you guess whom I mean?"

This postscript was read out in the pleasant twilight evening at "The Eyrie" in a pause after a hard-fought game of chess between Mr. Tremarten and Dr. Herron, and with Mary Herron, tall, sedate, and womanly, seated in Lettice's place at the organ.

"You see my little girl says nothing about coming home just yet, doctor," said Mr. Tremarten, folding up his letter.

The doctor was knitting his brows furiously. "Ivie M'Cormack—Ivie M'Cormack," he was saying half to himself, "yes, I remember him perfectly also, and unless he has altered immensely since I knew him, he's not a fit person for your daughter or any woman living to associate with."

On that selfsame evening, but a little further on towards midnight, or rather day-dawn, the personages under discussion—Captain Ivie M'Cormack and his sister Lilla—were seated in a daintily-furnished boudoir in their house in Mayfair, a few doors from the quiet old family mansion of the Misses Tremarten. There is a soft reading-lamp on a side table which suffices to light the somewhat small room, itself a *bijou* in delicate rose pink and turquoise

blue. Miss Lilla and her brother have just returned from a reception "small and early," at which they have encountered Lettice and her aunts, and have retired to the lady's *sanctum sanctorum* to discuss the events of the evening, which seem somehow to be of unusual interest and importance to them.

Miss M'Cormack has thrown off her swansdown opera-cloak, and is leaning back in a low chair fanning herself with some Indian feather fan. She is a large woman, well-made, dark-complexioned, with prominent features, and in style and dress affects the Oriental. In age she may be about thirty years, but under the soft light of the lamp looks considerably younger. Her brother—"Captain Ivie" as he was generally called by his more intimate friends—is his sister's junior by about a year or two, and strongly resembles her in face and figure—resembles with a difference, for whereas in Lilla's face strong determination and will were marked in every line and feature, there was in the brother's—whether real or assumed it would be difficult to say—a look of languor or weariness which effectually prevented real feeling of any sort finding expression in his handsome features. He has, in addition to

the above-mentioned advantages, just a *soupeçon* of aristocratic drawl in his speech, a slow, dignified way of moving about a room, and an interested, deferential manner of listening to ladies' conversation, very captivating and fascinating, more especially to quite young girls. However, it must not be supposed but what at times this fascinating manner is laid on one side, especially when the speaker happens to be a sister and there is no one at hand to note the captain's ill-temper. Two or three times while Miss M'Cormack has been talking he has jumped up from his chair and sat down again, but as she has kept steadily on with her discourse, utterly ignoring his irritability and impatience, he contents himself with walking rapidly to and fro in the small space allowed by the innumerable tables and chairs in the tiny sitting-room.

"You know, Ivie," Miss M'Cormack concluded her long harangue with saying, "you know perfectly well I shall never pay another sixpence of your debts. I have all but beggared myself to clear you so far already, and I am perfectly certain if it hadn't been for your disreputable ways I shouldn't be a spinster at the present moment. Your only chance, I tell you, is to fascinate some girl

(with money, of course) in her first season, and stick to her in spite of every one and everything. You'd better make the most of your handsome face while it lasts, for I tell you plainly you are beginning to look horribly old and careworn" (here the captain glanced somewhat nervously at his own reflection in a mirror opposite), "and every season you and your ways become better known. My own belief is that you'll end with selling out, and will finish your days as a billiard-marker in some low tavern——" She breaks off suddenly. "Do sit down, Ivie; you annoy me so tramping up and down in that style. Remember you are not in barracks. We must talk matters over, and what way is there out of the difficulty if you set your mind so obstinately against matrimony?"

The captain throws himself into a low chair and flings one long arm over the gilt back.

"What way?" he mutters. "By Jove! I'd just as soon be bullied by a wife as a sister."

"Don't be rude, Ivie," Lilla rejoins. "You ought to be grateful to me for taking so much trouble. I don't know another sister who would stand what I've stood for

you. You never had any brains to spare, you know" (here the captain impatiently kicks over a footstool at his feet), "and if I don't put you in the way of getting a rich wife, of course you'll end in some disreputable manner. Now there's Lettice Tremarten——"

Now the captain jumps to his feet.

"Look here, Lilla," he says, "let's understand each other. Once for all, let me tell you, whatever traps and snares I set for my own interest and yours, I'm not quite villain enough to put them just in the way of that sweet little innocent girl. We'll drop that, please."

Lilla merely raises her arched eyebrows and goes steadily on—

"Oh, are you really hit at last, Ivie? I wasn't aware—that will make things go all the better. As I was saying, there's Lettice Tremarten. Not bad-looking."

"Not bad-looking!" growls the captain. "Why, she's heavenly!"

Lilla resumes—

"I'm not a man, Ivie, to rave over a milk-and-water girl of eighteen. I repeat, she's not bad-looking, although she has been brought up in a very absurd manner in a sweetly-simple style absolutely ridi-

culous in these days. However, perhaps her bringing up may turn out to be rather an advantage to you than otherwise, as she will find it all the more difficult to realise the nature and extent of your sins against society."

"For heaven's sake, Lilla, don't wind about in that way!" ejaculates the captain. "Come to the point at once and be done with it, and let my sins alone."

"If you intend to be rude, Ivie, you had better leave the room. I really have no interest in the matter beyond getting you off my hands. The first heiress you succeed in catching I shall hail as an angel of deliverance, and shall be kind and attentive to in the extreme. Why you should fly into one of your tempers whenever Miss Tremarten's name is mentioned is a mystery to me. Those old-maid aunts of hers have no one else to leave their money to. Her father, judging from his tastes and habits, cannot be a poor man. Altogether, I should say she must eventually come into some twenty-five or thirty thousand a year. If you can manage the affair yourself by all means do so; but you know, as a rule, you make a mess of nearly everything you put your fingers into."

Captain Ivie draws a long breath.

"Lilla, what a fool you are not to let a man smoke in your room! A puff would stand for a whole volley."

"Thanks," says Lilla sweetly, "I don't admire the habit. I was saying, if you think you can manage this little affair by yourself by all means do so, but if you want my assistance I am quite willing to take the unpleasant part off your hands."

"If they allowed petticoats in Parliament, by Jove! you'd make yourself a name," mutters the captain.

Lilla takes no heed.

"You have so far done the pleasant part to perfection, with your looks of intense admiration and the rapt attention you have paid to her silly schoolgirlish talk. I believe the girl is in love with you without knowing it. I caught her once or twice this evening looking at you in a very spoony manner. All you have to do is to keep up your wonderful fascination, and——" Here she hesitates a little.

"And—and——" repeats the captain, now awakened to real interest by his sister's last sentences.

"And leave the rest to me," finishes

Lilla with a short laugh. "Good night, Ivie, I'm too tired to say another word."

And the captain, with his full knowledge of Lilla and her resolute temper, is perfectly certain that not another word will be said.

While Lettice's fate and fortune are being thus discussed by her friends and acquaintances, the Misses Tremarten themselves are beginning to feel a little anxiety on the matter.

Lettice and her affairs generally came upon the *tapis* in the early morning after breakfast while Lettice was enjoying her canter in the park, for neither of the Misses Tremarten being equestrians, they were obliged to hand over the chaperonage of their niece to a middle-aged matron of active habits and without encumbrances in the shape of single ineligible sons.

"I am not altogether pleased with the result of Lettice's first season," said Aunt Rosamond on one occasion as she and her sister sat quietly with their books and work in their pleasantly-furnished drawing-room.

Aunt Judith suspended her knitting for a moment, and commenced in her weak, quavering voice—

"Satisfied! No; how could you be?"

The girl is self-willed and ill-trained, and unless she turns over a new leaf the sooner she goes back to her father the better."

"I won't say that," the elder lady replied; "but still I am not satisfied with the turn matters are taking. Of course a great deal must be laid to the charge of the foolish education she has had and her total ignorance of the ways and small etiquettes of society. At the same time, unless she can be very well looked after during the next month, she will find herself not a little talked about at the end of the season."

"It's too much anxiety by far," chimed Aunt Judith. "It will wear you out altogether."

"I wouldn't mind that," replied Aunt Rosamond; "I can soon recruit when I go up to the North. I should feel well repaid if I could see Owen's child making a really creditable marriage—a marriage, indeed, that she ought to feel bound to make considering what her prospects are. At one time I dreaded the idea of her settling down as a country doctor's wife, but now I begin to fear she will choose even a worse fate than that. You see I hoped so much from this introduction to Lord Lochiel, and now it is ending in worse than nothing, for a man at

his time of life doesn't like to be played fast and loose with——”

“Ah,” interrupted Miss Judith with a deep sigh, “if we could only teach her what wickedness it is to play football with men's hearts——”

“Football! football!” echoed Lettice, coming into the room at that moment bright and radiant from her morning's ride, with a bunch of yellow roses in her hand, which she arranged tastefully in the bosom of her riding-habit while she was talking. “Football! Who is going to play, auntie? How I should enjoy a game if it were not the very middle of summer and every one at tropical heat! Is the irreproachable earl starting it among his tenantry?”

Aunt Rosamond frowned severely.

“Lettice, when you speak of my friends I will thank you to speak of them respectfully. Tell me, if you please, who were your companions this morning.”

“Oh, Mrs. St. John Waters and I started alone, afterwards ever so many joined us for a chat (all such nice people, auntie), among others Lilla M'Cormack and her brother.” This was said with a mischievous twinkle of the eye.

The aunts exchanged glances.

"Lettice," said Aunt Rosamond sternly, "you see a great deal too much of the M'Cormacks to please me. Lilla is all very well, but please remember I won't have you carrying on a flirtation with that Captain Ivie."

"But auntie, you know," pleaded Lettice, "I couldn't flirt—I am too unsophisticated! There was no one to teach me at home, and no one to practise on except poor old Roberts and Dr. Herron." Here she drew down the corners of her little mouth deprecatingly.

"Don't interrupt me, Lettice," said Aunt Rosamond angrily. "It seems to me you know quite as much about flirtation as any young lady of your age, and perhaps a little more. What I want to impress upon you is that it is incumbent upon a niece of mine and living under my roof to conduct herself at all times with propriety and to be wise in the selection of her intimate friends. And one thing let me warn you of, Lettice: I tell you frankly I won't incur the responsibility of having you here another season, so this will be your one and only chance of making a creditable marriage, therefore you had better be prudent and——"

"Make hay while the sun shines," laughs Lettice. "Yes, auntie, and I have

such a world of hay to make this morning that I must set about it this very minute."

"Captain and Miss M'Cormack," announced the footman at that moment, throwing back the drawing-room door.

Aunt Rosamond looked annoyed. Lettice rose instantly and shook hands warmly with Miss M'Cormack, gave a more subdued welcome to Captain Ivie, and said very softly to him as she passed out of the room, "Aunt Rosamond thinks I see too much of you. I really daren't stay and talk this morning. Good-bye till to-night."

"Really, Ivie," said Lilla to her brother that same night as they drove home from a ball at which the captain had managed to secure Lettice for no less than three round dances — "really, Ivie, you have made wonderful progress considering how short a time you have known that girl. What an immense restraint, too, you must have put upon yourself to confine your attentions absolutely to one young lady for a period of three weeks!"

"Hang it, Lilla," broke in Ivie, "can't you give a man credit for having a heart in his body even though he has been in the habit of handing it about in small por-

tions? I tell you that girl, as you call her——”

“Will be your wife before the end of the season if you play your cards properly and secure her before she has had time to find you out,” interrupted Lilla; “but if you allow society to rub off the rough edges of her rusticity or simplicity—whichever you like to call it—then she’ll throw you over as the others have done.”

After that identical ball there was heavy and prolonged consultation in the Misses Tremarten’s dressing-room as they too discussed the events of the evening and Miss Lettice’s deportment.

“It is not to be allowed,” said Aunt Rosamond with decision as she laid aside her lace lappets and jewelled pins for the nightcap of common life. “I know she is utterly ignorant of *les convenances*, but we are not, and her stupidity or wilfulness will be laid to our charge. Three round dances (the only three she danced) with Captain M’Cormack this evening, and when Lord Lochiel comes up for one quadrille she is ‘too tired,’ and that in spite of my frowns.”

“And I too frowned as hard as you did,” echoed Aunt Judith, “and I told her when I said good-night just now that we should

have much to say to her in the morning."

"I don't know that saying is much good, she is so heedless and self-willed. We must just bring all this flirtation and folly to an end, and make our flitting as soon as ever we can. It has this moment occurred to me we may as well accept Mrs. Rosneath's invitation to Perth. Her estate joins Lord Lochiel's, and he will soon be running down for the shooting. No doubt the M'Cormacks and the other undesirables will be off to Baden or Rome or Venice, and in this way we shall get clear of the whole objectionable clique."

And while her 'aunts are thus plotting and contriving her future, Lettice stands barefooted in her long white nightdress at her bedroom window above. Her brown hair has fallen all tangled and wavy over her forehead and down to her waist, and in spite of the lateness of the hour her eyes are bright and her cheeks flushed. She has put out her lights and thrown open her window to say good-night to the clear golden moon and myriads of silver stars shining out in the summer's sky, and is drinking in the fresh sweet air which comes to her redolent of the plants in the balcony below.

"Now over there is the west," she is saying to herself, "and down there somewhere are the dear old Welsh hills, and here is a great big kiss going to dear papa." She gathers one off her lips and throws it into the silent night air. "And here is another for Lilla M'Cormack," she says, throwing a second as far as her arm will reach; "and here is a third for——" But the rest of the sentence she whispers to herself.

CHAPTER III.

STILL AMONG CROWS.

THE London season has ended, another act in life's drama has been played out, and the actors, wearied with failure or dazzled with success, as the case may be, have one and all taken flight to hide their disappointment or freshen their laurels by Scottish hillsides or Swiss lakes, or any other of Nature's strongholds that wealth or fashion may dictate.

Lettice and her aunts are ensconced for a long visit at Mrs. Rosneath's wide, ugly, yet, beyond everything else, comfortable mansion in Perthshire, and Captain and Miss M'Cormack have suddenly discovered that there is a charming little shooting-box to let at Ingleside, not ten miles distant from Rosneath.

"The very place beyond any other," Lilla said to her brother as she signed and sealed her letter accepting the agent's offer of the house. "What consternation there will be in the camp when we put in our first appearance at Rosneath, and those wise old ladies

find themselves out-generalled by a young tactician like me! By-the-bye, they nearly put a stop to your running with their absurd surveillance of that girl the last few weeks."

Captain Ivie fidgeted. Bent as he was upon marrying Lettice, he could as yet scarcely bring his mind to the planning and scheming which Lilla conceived to be the only way of winning her.

He took up Lilla's letter.

"It's a cursed country for riding," he said—"hard, flinty, and rough. I know it well——"

"Of course you know it well," interrupted Lilla with a short laugh which grated unpleasantly on her brother's ear. "Isn't that delightful Scotch manse where you spent six weeks flirting with the minister's daughter somewhere near? What was the name of the girl—Miss Maggie Forbes or Ford? However, she'll not be likely to trouble us, so it doesn't much matter."

Captain Ivie winced again.

"'Pon my life, Lilla," he said, "I'd back you against any woman living in the art of making disagreeable speeches; you know well enough that thing has been over and done with long ago as far as I'm concerned." Then he lit a cigar and went out.

"Over and done with long ago," was it? No doubt as far as he was concerned it might be, but would the old Scotch pastor tell the same tale as he watched his pretty little daughter's rosy cheeks grow pale and her bright eyes become heavy and tear-dimmed, while she waited day after day for the letter which the handsome and fascinating captain had promised his sister would send, inviting her to stay at their London home as his promised wife?

Somewhere near Ingleside Captain Ivie had met with a riding accident, had been carried to the manse, and had been carefully nursed and tended by the pastor's only daughter. It was an old story: the patient got well and the nurse fell sick, but with another complaint, and then there had followed a little love episode (one among a thousand in the captain's life) which he was pleased to declare was now "all over and done with."

It was very true that the surveillance over Lettice towards the end of the season had been severe, and Lettice had rebelled against it proportionately. Her opportunities for meeting either the captain or Miss Lilla had considerably dwindled owing to the tact and determination of Aunt Rosamond, who

resolutely refused all invitations for Lettice where she thought there was the slightest chance of encountering the M'Cormacks.

On the one or two occasions, however, that Lettice and Captain Ivie had met it must be admitted that they each made the most of their opportunity.

"They'll frown and look savage if I dance with you, Captain M'Cormack, and scold me all the way home. (They always begin when we're all shut in together, and they know I can't get away.) But I won't dance with any one else to-night, I promise you that." And Lettice would keep her word, and to every one who came up "Hoping they might have the pleasure," she would be "Oh, so sorry, but I really am too tired," and she would sit as a wallflower for the rest of the evening.

"Can she really be in love with the man?" wondered Aunt Rosamond more than once; "and is she really clever enough to be laying her plans to marry him?" So dispensing with Goodwood and the last few balls of the season the lady hurried on their departure to the North, and a full ten days before the London world had spread its wings to take flight they were fairly ensconced as members of the Rosneath household.

"Oh, this is like dear old Wales again!" exclaimed Lettice as the blue Auchterils burst upon her view with their layers of grey mist towering peak over peak above the silent lakes. "Auntie Judie, I really think I must have been getting homesick without knowing it. I have been so good and quiet lately, but those darling little hills will wake me up to life again, and you really won't be able to hold me in now."

"Won't be able to hold her in now! Heavens!" groaned Aunt Rosamond in spirit, "have we ever been able to do so? What can a good Providence have in store for us now, I wonder?"

This question, however, was fated to have a very speedy solution, for Aunt Rosamond had scarcely begun to feel at home at Rosneath, had only just had time to choose a comfortable light corner for her writing-desk in the morning-room and a particular reclining-chair in the drawing-room for her own special use, when, to her unspeakable horror, Mrs. Rosneath announced the fact that Captain M'Cormack had taken Ingleside for the shooting season.

"Taken Ingleside! that man!" exclaimed Aunt Rosamond, in her surprise betraying herself. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Ros-

neath," she added, "if he is a friend of yours, but he has made himself a little unpleasant to me."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," replied her hostess, "because we all like Captain Ivie so much. He is an old friend of my husband's—a little fast perhaps, but still so delightful."

"Lettice," interrogated Aunt Rosamond, as soon as she found herself alone with her niece, "did you know the M'Cormacks had taken Ingleside, and would be down upon us here in a day or two?"

"Oh yes, auntie," laughed Lettice, "I knew it two days ago. Lilla wrote and told me they were coming, but I didn't say a word to you lest you should carry me off bodily just as I had begun to have a little fun."

Aunt Rosamond paused to collect her thoughts, frowning severely as she did so.

"Aunt Rosamond," pleaded Lettice, thinking a little explanation might be timely, "if you only knew——"

"I know exactly what that man is and what he is trying to do, Lettice," said Aunt Rosamond angrily; "and let me tell you, once for all, that I will not for the rest of the time you are under my care allow the slightest approach to a flirtation on your part with him."

"Auntie," said Lettice, batting a tennis-ball high in the air as she spoke—they were standing together on the lawn—"I've told you over and over again that I can't flirt, and never shall be able to. The only reason I"—here another ball was sent into the neighbouring bushes—"like to talk to Captain M'Cormack is"—a third ball rises and falls and is sent off again—"that he once knew that dear old Doctor Herron who is taking such care of papa, and we are always talking about *him* all the time you think I am flirting." Here Lettice put both little hands into her tennis-apron's pocket. "Auntie, all the balls are gone; I'm so sorry, but I must run and find them while I remember where they are," and away she flew.

And Miss Tremarten, left standing alone in the sunshine under a big green umbrella, tried to see her way out of the difficulties which beset her on every side. "If she goes back to Wales free and unfettered she will be certain to marry *that* country doctor," she argued to herself; "if she sees much more of *that* captain it will end in an elopement I'm convinced, and if I take her from here tomorrow she will lose all chance of winning *the*" (mark, not *that*) "earl. Is there any

possible road out of such a maze of troubles?"

So the old lady stood thinking and thinking in the bright sunshine with the birds twittering all round her. The sound of young merry voices and the click click of croquet balls and mallets came to her from the other side of the hedge, for Mrs. Rosneath's house had begun to fill now, and there was also a constant flux and reflux of visitors from Lord Lochiel's, which adjoined Rosneath.

And as the old lady stood there her mind was made up and her plan of action formed. Yes, Lettice was tiresome, Lettice was headstrong, but as yet she had not done anything egregiously wrong. She was her only brother's only child, and the young mother who had lived and died in those far-away years had been a much-cherished friend. Then, too, the girl was her own and Judith's heiress, and how much more creditable and respectable would it be that the family estates and property should pass into the hands of a Countess Lochiel than into those of a country doctor's wife or a Mrs. M'Cormack! Aunt Rosamond shuddered in fancy as the dreadful combination of syllables passed through her mind. "She may think

herself very clever, and Miss Lilla M'Cor-mack may think *herself* very clever, and the captain no doubt fancies he has brains, but perhaps they will find that some one else has brains too." And the lady slanted her green sunshade carefully over her eyes and went back to her shady nook in the drawing-room perfectly satisfied with the part she had resolved to play.

Her plan, after all, was a very simple one. She would stay at Rosneath another eight days only. In a week's time there was to be a grand archery *fête* and distribution of prizes at Lochiel Castle. Lettice's skill in archery was pronounced, and far above the average; her dress too, of dark green and cream, suited her *à ravir*, and there was little doubt but what with her bright delicate beauty and the prestige of her previous successes she would be the queen of the day. Lord Lochiel, whose attentions had been marked and unremitting since their arrival at Rosneath, would, she was sure, fairly succumb to such a combination of attractions, and no doubt his coronet would be at Lettice's feet before the end of the day. "If Lettice accepts him," argued the lady—and what girl could be proof against a coronet?—"I shall the next day carry her off

to Paris before she has had time to alter her mind, and also to order her *trousseau*, for there shall be no long engagement, I'll take care of that. And if she refuses him I shall carry her off all the same. We'll do Paris, and the Alps, and Switzerland, and Vienna, and Rome, and—and——" here the energetic old lady was compelled to pause and arrange her geographical knowledge—"and New York," she went on, "and Niagara, and Utah, and Mexico, and Heaven only knows where we won't go before I let her return to either of her disreputable suitors."

But while Aunt Rosamond was so comfortably planning out her own and her niece's future, Captain and Miss M'Cormack were spinning a web of a somewhat different texture.

Very close and confidential had been the talk of brother and sister during their drive over the last ten miles of their journey which brought them to Ingleside.

"It's your last chance, Ivie," said the sister; "it's now or never without a doubt. Follow out my advice to the very letter, or else you'll ruin everything."

"I suppose I must," replied Ivie, twirling his long silken moustache, for Lilla had fairly talked him into obedience now. "I

should be very sorry, though, 'pon my honour, if it all fell through, and Lettice—Miss Tremarten I mean—were compromised in any way."

"You idiot!" said Lilla in low angry tones. "You haven't the sense of a tomtit even, I declare. Don't you see that the girl *must* be compromised, or else it will fall through? How do you mean to get her, I should like to know, if not in the way I propose? Do you mean, after you have talked her over, to go to her father and tell him that you have little more than your pay to live on—that you are up to your eyes in debt, and have given paper enough to the Jews to write a volume of sermons on, and then are you fool enough to imagine he will give you his handsome daughter with her fortune unfettered by settlements and trustees? Bah! I've no patience with such imbecility." And Miss Lilla resolutely shut her mouth and refused to open it for the rest of the journey.

Lettice wondered much at not seeing either Captain Ivie or his sister for two or three days after their arrival, of which she had heard through her maid.

Lilla's orders to her brother, however, had been very positive on that head.

"Don't on any account show yourself at Rosneath till the archery day, Ivie. Here's Lochiel's card," she said, handing it to him. "Depend upon it the old dragons will carry off the princess at once if the disreputable knight makes his appearance on the scene. Their maid told mine the other day when they met in the village that they were to leave the day after the *fête*. I've no doubt the clever old ladies imagine that Miss Lettice in dark green will knock Lord Lochiel over completely, but perhaps there are some others as clever as they, and Miss Lettice, instead of carrying off a coronet, may be carried off herself. But for Heaven's sake, Ivie, don't forget it's your very last chance; if you let that day pass it's all up with you. Once they get her away from here your little game is over."

The day for the archery *fête* dawned in brilliant blue sky and golden sunshine, and, best of all, without even the rustle of a soft south wind.

"Of course the irreproachable earl will think of the immaculate tenants," said Lettice to her aunts as she buckled on her waist-belt and counted up her arrows. "I only hope there won't be a crowd."

"My dear," said Aunt Rosamond, "some

day you may be very sorry for the way in which you habitually speak of a very dear friend of mine and one worthy of all esteem."

Aunt Rosamond spoke so gently (for her, that is) that Lettice was moved to instant penitence.

"Auntie, please forgive me," she said, going up to the old lady and kissing her. "I don't know why I am so ill-tempered this morning. I think I'm getting a little tired of all this gaiety, there seems so much to get through to-day before bedtime. First the shooting, then the dinner, then the ball, and it seemed as if a crowd would add to the tiresomeness of it all."

It flashed through Aunt Rosamond's mind that it was just possible that the unexplained absence of Captain Ivie and his sister from the gaieties of the neighbourhood might have something to do with Lettice's weariness and irritability. However, she very wisely abstained from any questions.

"My dear," she said kindly, "you are a little overdone. Directly after the prizes are given away you had better go into the library at Lochiel (it will be the quietest room in the house such a day as this) and have a long rest, then you will be bright and fresh by dinner-time."

And the good old lady's mind wandered away to another possibility—viz., what if, from a hint she might let fall, Lord Lochiel were to choose the same quiet room for a little rest, and what if—— But here her thoughts were broken off by the announcement that the carriage was waiting that was to take them to the castle.

“A rosebud garden of girls,” was Lord Lochiel's comment, as, having welcomed Lettice and her aunts, he led them through the winding paths of the shrubberies to where, in a pleasantly-shaded corner of the grounds, the targets had been placed. Some twenty or thirty young ladies, dressed becomingly in the archer's green and silver, were sauntering hither and thither on the smoothly-shaven lawn; others, in gauzy pink or maize, wandered in and out trying the points of the arrows, sometimes even essaying a shot, and a low murmur and ripple of talk and laughter mingled with the pleasant twitter of the birds in the big firs above, and the humming of the heather-fed bees.

“It is quite too delightful,” exclaimed Lettice, rousing herself with an effort, and making up her mind once for all that she would thoroughly enjoy her day. Lettice's

idea of a day's enjoyment, however, was certainly not to spend it in the company of a middle-aged nobleman and two elderly maiden aunts, so she quickly made her way to the centre of the girl-throng and fluttered in and out like the rest.

Perhaps she had never looked so lovely before. The birds, and the sunshine, and the flowers had swept away the clouds of discontent and annoyance which had certainly begun to gather on her low, smooth brow. Her bright brown hair had already begun to curl and ripple below the rim of her dark green hat ("What will it be by the end of the afternoon?" sighed Aunt Rosamond), and her eyes were beaming and sparkling with that hidden light of merriment and mischief which those of Lettice's friends who knew her best were wont to call "danger signals."

"Scotland seems to suit Miss Tremarten," said Lord Lochiel to Aunt Rosamond, as he noted the pretty rose tint on Lettice's cheeks, the bright coral lips, and the light, joyous, musical laugh which came across to them where they stood, a little apart from the more youthful guests.

Aunt Rosamond assented, and fell to wondering in her own mind how Lettice's

quiet rest in the library could be best arranged, and however would it be possible for Lord Lochiel to detach himself, even for half-an-hour, from this crowd of guests and tenants.

For a crowd it certainly was. The earl's invitations had been given on a most extensive scale. He was a popular man—that is to say, a locally popular man among all classes of the community, being known far and near as a good landlord, with an aptitude for farming land and breeding cattle. How he came to be fascinated by so light and fun-loving a creature as Lettice Tremarten it would be difficult to explain, but that he was so attracted was evident to the most careless observer or most zealous toxophilite of that gay garden throng.

“Now that you have done your part, Miss Tremarten, may I ask you to give me a few minutes? I want to show you a splendid beast—a Cromarty bull I mean; I shall put him in for the next agricultural.”

So Lord Lochiel at Lettice's elbow, as, amid a storm of applause, she succeeded in making two or three good hits.

“Oh no,” said Lettice lightly, “I am going to stay here the whole day through,

without ever once moving, till all the shooting is over. I want to see everything and speak to every one," and she plunged into light talk with a somewhat insipid young attaché on her other side.

Aunt Rosamond frowned—Lettice could *feel* the frown at ten yards' distance. But what were frowns to her to-day? She had made up her mind to thoroughly enjoy everything, let those frown who would, let those stay away who would!

Yet those who stood nearest to Miss Lettice, with her flashing face and sparkling eyes, on that bright, sunshiny morning, might have noted that ever and anon, as a slight stir among the visitors and a forward movement on the part of Lord Lochiel denoted the arrival of another guest, a look of inquiry (anxiety almost) would pass over her face, to be followed by one a shade darker as the new-comer took his or her place among the spectators.

For neither Captain nor Miss M'Cormack had made their appearance.

"Now I'm thoroughly tired out, auntie," whispered Lettice to Miss Tremarten as a clock in the distance chimed four. "I'm going to steal away, not to the library, but to the little dressing-room they've given me,

and I'm going to lock myself in for a good two hours' sleep."

"Lettice!" began Aunt Rosamond (oh! that wilful girl, thus to frustrate all the plans of her elders and betters), "the library is larger, cooler, you'll be more refreshed——"

"Now don't begin, there's a dear," said Lettice. "You stay here and see who'll get the gold arrow. I know: that girl with so much orange about her will carry all before her. Don't come and tell me, auntie, though, for I shan't let you in, and"—(this in a laughing whisper)—"and don't you be flirting with any one while I'm away."

And Lettice, slipping in and out among the assembled guests, gained a narrow shaded path which led, with many turns and windings, through the orchard and vegetable gardens to the house.

"Miss Tremarten! Miss Tremarten!" said a soft, low voice at her side.

Lettice started and turned pale. Oh yes, she knew the voice well enough. Was it not the one she had been longing and listening for all the time she had seemed so busily occupied with her bows and arrows, and chatting and laughing so pleasantly with her friends?

But where could it come from? The narrow winding path she was following was skirted on one side by a thick hedge of holly and other evergreens, through which she could still catch glimpses of the bright and varied dresses of the ladies in the distance. On the other side a light low fence, overhung by a few alders and ash-trees, marked the division of the castle flower-garden from a series of low-lying meadows where Lord Lochiel's shorthorns were calmly grazing.

Lettice looked round her on every side. "Miss Tremarten!" again called the voice, and now through the interlaced boughs of some overgrown wild bush Lettice could plainly distinguish Captain M'Cormack's face and figure.

"Oh, Miss Tremarten," the captain went on, "I've been waiting here so long for you—that is, in fact, I've been waiting everywhere to get a few minutes alone with you."

"Alone with me, Captain M'Cormack!" repeated Lettice, amazed. She was scarcely prepared to have the request placed before her thus abruptly.

"I can't stop to explain, Miss Tremarten. I've bad news—confounded bad news—don't know how to break it to you—bad hand at that sort of thing. Lilla has had a

spill in a mad sort of a gallop she was having just now, and is dangerously hurt. She is lying at a farmhouse close by. I've come like the wind to tell you. Poor girl! she says she knows she will die, and must see you before she goes."

Lettice drew a long breath. She had nearly said "Thank God!" when the captain mentioned Lilla's name, for her fears had flown to her father at the first thought of bad news. Then she turned sick and bewildered. "How can I go, Captain M'Cormack?" she said; "who will take me? If I ask Aunt Rosamond she'll put me in prison at once."

"Come in my cart—I have it round the corner," said the captain, "only come at once, for Heaven's sake—for poor Lilla's sake I mean—if you want to see her alive."

Lettice hesitated another moment. It was all so strange and unexpected—wonderful, too, it was to see Captain M'Cormack thus strangely agitated, he who was so calm and nonchalant as a rule. It was almost like some spectre or phantom rising up in the midst of a revel. She paused bewildered and uncertain.

"Am I to go back and tell her you won't

come?" asked Ivie impatiently. "I didn't think you were so cold-hearted a friend."

"No, no, I'm not cold-hearted," replied Lettice hurriedly, "but I must tell Aunt Rosamond."

"And do you think Aunt Rosamond will let you come? I implore you, Miss Tremarten, not to think of the small etiquettes of society at such a time as this. There is a gate just at the end of this walk which leads into the meadow, and another in the meadow which leads into the high road. If you will only make haste—if you would just for once forget that you are a young lady, and remember only that you are a true, tender-hearted woman——"

Lettice did not wait for another appeal. To be reproached with having sunk her womanhood in young-ladyism was more than she could bear. Without another word she ran lightly along the narrow path, swung back the tiny iron gate, and hastily followed Captain Ivie across the meadow to the high road.

There stood a small light phaeton, to which were harnessed a pair of thoroughbred fast-going ponies. A man held their heads. "Here, Ellis," said Captain M'Cormack to him, "you must explain everything

to Miss Tremarten and Lord Lochiel. Please make haste" (this to Lettice); "it is a matter of life and death."

Lettice sprang lightly into the phaeton, Ivie was by her side in an instant, the man let go the horses, and with a rear and a plunge they started off at a tremendous pace along the dusty high road.

Then it was Lettice began to ask a few questions. "How was it Lilla was riding and you were driving, Captain M'Cormack?" she said.

"She altered her mind at the last moment. Overnight she told me I was to drive her over here for the archery, and I ordered Dido and Daniel to be harnessed. Then this morning she came down in her riding-habit and said she had had a letter from Mary Loder (Miss Willis that was), wishing her to meet her at Auchterarder and go on to Perth with her. Lilla is due at Perth next week, but she thought it would be pleasanter to go with Mary than to travel alone, and as Donegal wanted a good gallop she said she would take it out of him and throw over the archery altogether. You know, Miss Tremarten, she is never particularly fond of young ladies' society. However, they had got this thing ready, so I jumped in and

went with her, meaning, of course, to be back for the ball to-night; then that hard-mouthed brute shied at something, Heaven only knows what, and pitched her over. Poor girl! I made sure her neck was broken. Hey, Daniel, steady! what are you pulling at?" This to the pony.

"Where did it happen? where is she lying?" was Lettice's next question.

"Oh, close by," replied Ivie, "a—that is, at Ardvaroch, not very far from here."

"At Ardvaroch?" repeated Lettice. She did not know much of the geography of the neighbourhood. She knew there were waterfalls at or near Ardvaroch, and that it was something of a show place, but she had an idea it was somewhere among the blue Auchterils."

"A — that is, near Ardvaroch," resumed Captain M'Cormack, seeing her surprise; and then they drove on some distance in silence.

Presently Lettice recommenced: "Captain M'Cormack, how much further have we to go? We have been nearly an hour as it is."

"Oh, we're nearly there, Miss Tremarten; another ten minutes only." And again he whipped up the ponies.

Another ten minutes passed, and another and another, and Lettice began to feel chill and strange. A sudden turn in the road had brought them into a tract of desolate, flinty country. The fair pastureland, with its well-fed cattle and pleasant-looking cottages, had altogether disappeared. Wild, uncultivated fields skirted either side of the road, with here and there a ragged brown fir, and the dark heather-crowned hills stood out in gloomy distinctness against the changing light of the autumn sky.

"Captain M'Cormack," began Lettice once more, "have you any idea how I'm to get back again?"

"Oh, Lettice," exclaimed the captain, "talk about getting to her if you will. My poor Lilla! even now it may be all over with her."

Lettice made no reply. Somehow she could not realise the captain's grief, and there was an unreality, a mystery about it all which greatly puzzled her. "Well, anyhow I must finish what I've begun," she reasoned, trying to reassure herself. "Aunties will be in an awful rage when I get back, no doubt, and will pack me off home to-morrow, I daresay, but won't papa

be glad to see me, that's all! Heigho! those dear old Welsh hills!"

So they went on and on, Lettice wondering when and where and how the journey would end. The sun began to fire the western sky, the shadows began to lengthen and the hills to glow orange and scarlet instead of purple and brown, when suddenly the captain drew rein before a low stone-built cottage which stood sideways to the lonely road.

"Is this the farmhouse?" asked Lettice in surprise.

"Queer place, isn't it?" rejoined the captain; "they call it farm-house about here, but where the farm is I don't know."

A woman came out, but her Scotch was so broad that Lettice made no attempt to understand her. The captain somehow made her comprehend that the lady wanted to see the sick lady upstairs, and "Send your husband, my good woman," he added, "to see to my ponies."

A man came out as he spoke, and Lettice, leaving the captain to look after his horses, followed the woman up a flight of somewhat dark narrow stairs.

They entered a low-roofed room, and there, stretched on a mattress on the floor

or on some improvised bed, Lettice could trace in the growing darkness the outline of her friend.

"Thank God, Lettice, you are come!" said Lilla in a faint voice. "It was selfish of me to send for you, but if you only knew what I have suffered and what was on my mind when I fell——"

Lilla stopped suddenly, for Lettice, overtired with the day's excitement and fatigue, had broken down utterly, and flinging herself on to the floor by the side of her friend, had hidden her face in the pillows, and was sobbing convulsively.

"Oh, hush-sh, my darling," said Lilla. "Now I feel how selfish I've been. Oh do forgive me, but when I fell I had but one thought on my mind. Oh, hush-sh, hush-sh, dear, don't give way so."

"No-o," said Lettice, partially recovering herself, "I won't give way. But don't have anything on your mind, Lilla. I've heard papa say that our poor old vicar, Wynne Williams, didn't get well because he had something on his mind, and you won't get well if you've anything on your mind. Tell me what it is at once, dear."

"Oh, it was about poor old Ivie, Lettice. You know we have been everything to each

other for so many years, and I've taken care of him all through his life. He is so broken-hearted about me, and what will he do when I'm gone if you don't take pity on him?"

Lettice started. She had not expected this. Her face was still hidden in the pillows, but Lilla felt her hand tremble in her clasp.

"But you're not going to die, Lilla; I know you won't; and Captain Ivie doesn't really care a bit about me——"

"Oh yes, dear, he does," interrupted Lilla; "he is almost mad about you, but doesn't dare ask you because he is so poor and you will be so dreadfully rich, and if I die——"

Lettice looked up, sobbing still. "Now, Lilla"—a sob—"don't talk like that"—another sob. "If you die (but of course you won't) I promise you I'll marry Captain Ivie. There, you've nothing on your mind now, so be quiet."

Then she laid her head down on the pillows and sobbed again.

Lilla made no reply. It wasn't quite the answer she expected to have, but still she felt she must be contented with it. She had, so she hoped, in some sort paved

the way for her brother to go in and win.

Presently the captain came up. Lettice did not lift her head. Somehow she felt she couldn't look him in the face just then.

"I know, Miss Tremarten," he said very softly, "you will be glad to hear that the doctor, who came to my sister while I was away fetching you, doesn't think there are any bones broken—in fact, he hopes to-morrow we shall be able to get her back to Ingleside."

"Thank God!" murmured Lettice. Still she did not lift her face.

"I fear you will not be able to get back to Rosneath to-night," the captain went on. "It is dark now—past eight"—and he tried by the dim light shining through the narrow panes to look at his watch—"the roads are so bad and my poor ponies so worn out——"

"No," said Lettice faintly, "I feel I couldn't travel to-night—I should break down on the road. I will stay here with Lilla, but some one must take a letter to Aunt Rosamond."

She lifted her head wearily for an instant, then it fell back on the pillow once more, for in good truth she was utterly overdone.

"Poor child, she is worn out!" said

Captain Ivie with something of remorse in his tone. Then he went to the narrow window, and by what little light was left scribbled a few hasty lines on a leaf of his pocket-book. This he held out to Lettice. "The man downstairs will take it. Will you read what I've written, Miss Tremarten," he said, "and tell me if there's anything else to say to your aunts?"

Then he struck a cigar-match, and by its light Lettice's weary eyes managed to make out the following words in the captain's bold hand:—

"M'Kenzie's Cottage, Ardvarroch.

"Miss Tremarten is safe and well, but thoroughly worn out.

"IVIE M'CORMACK."

"You've put two r's together in Ardvarroch," said Lettice, brightening up for an instant, "and there's only one. Oh, and please tell them to send for me the first thing in the morning. Oh dear me," she added, with another sigh, "I shall soon get back to dear papa now."

The captain returned to the window and recommenced writing. "The first thing in the morning," he repeated, as though he were writing the words; then he turned

again to Lettice. "Miss Tremarten," he said kindly, "the next room to this will be unoccupied, for the good woman of the house will be in and out attending to Lilla all night; will you like to lie down there? We'll call you directly your people come in the morning. Stay, you must have some brandy-and-water and a biscuit or something before you lie down." He hastily mixed some in his flask and handed it to her.

Lettice rose wearily. "I am so ashamed of myself to break down like this; I will just lie down for a little while, and then I'll come back and help nurse Lilla through the rest of the night." She stooped over Lilla and smoothed her hair, kissing her affectionately, then Captain Ivie held back the door of the little room for her to pass out, and opening another which joined it on the dark narrow landing, with many apologies introduced Lettice to her room.

"It's such horrible accommodation, Miss Tremarten; not even a light to be found in the house. I suppose these good people are always in bed by sunset." He bent, reverently almost, over her little hand, which he retained for a minute in his own, looking up in her face with a gaze so intense that Lettice thrilled and trembled under it, and

could scarcely command her voice to bid him "Good night" as she shut the door of the room.

What was it made her draw the bolt which she felt under the handle of the door, and then try the door itself to see that it really was properly secured? What strange feeling of distrust or dread was it that made her take a close survey of the tiny ill-furnished room to see if there were any cupboards or hiding-places in it? and why was it that when she threw herself on the low hard bed which stood under a narrow high window, instead of falling, as she had anticipated, at once into a heavy dreamless sleep, her heart beat so fast, and her breath came and went so quickly, that rest was impossible?

"It's so hot and close," she murmured to herself; "and I'm sure if I had a light I should see it is all frightfully dirty. Oh dear! what a funny day this has been!"

Then she stood up on the bed and tried if the window would open wider; it was a narrow casement, and the people of the house had evidently never felt the need of fresh air, for one half of the window remained from disuse so firmly fixed that it resisted all her efforts to open it, so she

gave up the attempt, and was about to throw herself once more on the little hard bed when Captain Ivie's voice, speaking softly to the woman of the house in the paved yard under the window, fell upon her ear.

"As the inn is so near, my good woman, I should much prefer your sleeping there. You see it's of the first importance to my sister that the house should be perfectly quiet; she's a little sick and faint, that's all, with over-riding, and a good night's rest will set her up again all right. Your husband has gone over to the inn already with the horses, and tell him, please, to bring them round the first thing in the morning—at sunrise. Good night; I won't forget to pay you well for turning you out of your house in this unceremonious way. Oh, stay—bring me a candle." Then he came in.

What was this? Lettice's brain was in a feverish whirl, and her heart beat violently. What was this maze of lies and contradictions?—the woman sent out of the house to sleep, Lilla "only a little sick and feverish," the man despatched, not to Lochiel, but to the little inn, and, after all, a candle in the house; were they deceiving her—playing off some trick on her for a purpose of their own? Her breath came and went rapidly, and she

trembled from head to foot as now she could hear Captain Ivie's step mounting the narrow stairs.

He paused for a moment outside her door, as though he were listening for her movements, then he went on to his sister's room, and Lettice heard the door close after him.

And suddenly, to her amazement, a streak of light, narrow and faint at first, but afterwards wider and brighter, showed on the partition which separated her room from Lilla's, and, groping softly her way towards it, she found it came through a division in the skirting-board from the wall, and through this crack also came to her the sound of voices—Lilla's and Captain Ivie's.

"I tell you, Ivie," the former was saying in low but positive tones—"I tell you I know perfectly well what to do without any advice from you. Haven't I arranged the whole thing from beginning to end, and isn't it all owing to me that you've got on so well so far?"

"Yes, Lilla, quite true," replied the captain in the same guarded tones, "you've made me a bigger villain than I ever thought it was in me to be."

"Don't be a fool," interrupted Lilla.

"Wait till you've got the girl and thirty thousand a year, and then——"

"Ah, then," said Ivie with a sneer, "I suppose you think you'll have the earl and thirty thousand a year."

"Why, Ivie, you're getting quite clever," said Lilla tauntingly; "you'll be able to manage your own affairs soon. But, instead of standing here quarrelling, you had far better be practising how to make love to the young lady in the morning, for after I've gone everything will rest on your own shoulders. Hark!" she broke off suddenly, "what noise was that? Can the girl be awake and moving about?"

What noise was that? Only a sob from poor Lettice, who, broken-hearted on the other side of the partition, listened to the revelation of her friends' treachery. Ivie and his sister listened intently for a few seconds, and Lettice held in her breath and her sobs with a strong hand, for now she was determined to know the worst.

"It was your fancy," said Ivie. "She is so thoroughly worn out, and the dose of brandy I gave her was so strong, she'll sleep no doubt till the morning."

"Very well, then, Ivie, for the last time let me tell you my plan, and see if you

understand it all thoroughly. Now I shall leave here as soon as that man brings a horse round, go on to Auchterarder and take train to Perth, where I shall stay at the Lodgers', at Ingleside. They think I am there at the present moment. No one imagines me here with you. Our little device as to Ingleside will make them lose a great deal of time, more especially as Ellis won't give any message at all until he sees she's missed. Then he'll send up word by some one that Captain Ivie drove her to Ingleside, that she's there at the present moment, and then he'll make off as fast as he can. I can fancy the consternation there will be among the two old ladies and their old maid. Miss Judy will go into hysterics, and Aunt Rosamond will try to keep her quiet and hush up matters from Lord Lochiel and the other people in the house till they've sent to Ingleside to fetch the young lady. Then, when they come back without her, the old aunts won't believe she isn't there, and then they'll go themselves and cross-question our people, who won't know anything at all, and there'll be a lot of time lost and it'll be nearly ten o'clock at night, and too late to do anything till the morning, which gives the game into

your hands, Ivie," she finished, with a triumphant ring in her voice.

"I'm not so sure of that," muttered Ivie, with no triumphant ring in his voice.

"Then you ought to be, with everything made straight and plain before you. What! do you mean to tell me that your powers of persuasion are so small that you really can't talk a girl over when she is already half way in love with you? Oh, if I had your part to play I'd do it to perfection. Swear to her you're dying for her and all that sort of thing, tell her you've done it all—plotted, lied, sinned—all for her sweet sake, and are ready to do it over and over again to win her, &c., &c., &c., and so on *ad infinitum*, making the best possible use of your handsome eyes all the time. Frighten her with the terrible anger of her father and relatives, scare her with the thought of the censure society will fling upon her and the way in which she will be talked about if the whole caravanserai from Lochiel Castle come down and find her with you. Meantime have the horses brought round and hurry matters on; tell her you can hear the crack of the Lochiel riding-whips and Aunt Judy's hysterics; and if in the end you don't carry her off triumphantly in your chariot, why——"

"Why what?" growled Ivie.

"Why you deserve to lose her. What does it matter even if they overtake you and bring her back, the girl will be fairly compromised, and that they'll have the sense to see, and they'll know perfectly well that if you don't marry her no one else will. You can make your own terms on the matter. As I told you, the game is in your hands entirely now."

"Lilla," said her brother, as he opened the door to go downstairs, "I believe you are the fiend himself incarnate!"

"Thanks," said Lilla indifferently, "your sister. Good night."

For a few minutes Lettice lay like one stunned on the floor by the side of the partition. Her brain refused at first to take in the whole blackness and treachery of the plot which had been weaved against her, her blinding, choking tears ceased, and she felt almost as though her whole being had been turned into stone. Little by little, however, the truth began to creep into her mind that there she was with these two, literally in prison till the morning, and the morning light which brought her friends to the rescue would bring also upon her the scorn and censure of the world.

"Oh, papa! papa!" she moaned in her heart, "if you could only see your little girl now! And Dr. Herron I know would kill Captain Ivie if he could get at him."

The thought of these two so far away brought back a little strength and hope to her heart. Was there really no way of escape from the perils which beset her? Should she make an appeal to Ivie—throw herself on his honour? Ah no! what could he do? He would, no doubt, pretend to aid her escape and rejoice to show himself anywhere and everywhere in her company only to draw her more closely into his toils. And Lilla? Could she trust one who had already bitterly deceived her? She clasped her hands together—"My God! is there no way of escape?" She dared not move, scarce breathe, for fear of betraying herself, but, sitting there on the floor, she felt almost as though her reason were leaving her, so terrible was the strain of anguish she endured.

Presently the sounds of heavy breathing came to her from the next room, and she could tell that Lilla was asleep, still she dared not move, for she could hear Ivie walking slowly backwards and forwards in the room beneath her own. "Would he really play the gaoler thus right on till morn-

ing?" thought Lettice. She had not noticed the house sufficiently on entering to tell its exact geography, but she felt sure there was but one staircase to it, which ran straight down into the little sitting-room where Ivie was, and one back and one front door both opening out of the same apartment.

O the suspense, the terribleness of those minutes Lettice passed, crouched on the bare boards listening to Ivie's regular soldier-like tread beneath! With each creak of his footsteps her heart seemed to bound and then stand still. Would they never cease—would they never cease, or would the day dawn and find her still kneeling there hopeless and helpless?

But at length they did cease, and, thank Heaven! Lettice could hear Ivie pull off his boots, then there came the creak of an old wooden bedstead as though he had thrown himself heavily upon it, and then all was still.

Yet she dared not move; she crouched lower and lower to the floor till her ear almost touched the boards, and after a few seconds of anxious terror and suspense she could hear that he too, like his sister, slept.

With limbs stiffened and cold, with her brain scorching and burning, she rose from

the floor, and then almost staggered and fell. What time had she before her? Ah, perhaps only an hour at most, for Captain Ivie might rouse at any moment, possibly would, to make sure his prey had not escaped him. Something shining on the rickety old table caught her eye—the glass of brandy-and-water Ivie had mixed for her. Very thankfully she took a long draught of it, and felt some little strength and energy come back to her; then very softly, very slowly, she crept on to her bed once more, and leaning out of the window took a survey of the yard beneath.

A fresh wind was rising now, and an old fir-tree on the other side of the wall was beginning to creak and toss its arms, a few light clouds were flying across the somewhat pale watery moon, and a sound of rush and tumble in the distance told her there must be some falling water near.

And as her eyes became accustomed to the half-gloom of the autumn night she could trace the outline of some low-built outhouse close under her casement. Was it three feet below—was it six feet? She could not tell—her sight and brain were alike bewildered; all she felt and knew was she must reach it somehow, and then take

her chance of whatever means of escape offered themselves. An old curtain hung by the window; could she trust it? Ah no! its supports were, no doubt, rotten like the rest of the house, and would come down with a crash and betray her. There was only one way, and she mounted on the narrow ledge, crept on hands and knees through the half-opened casement, and then, holding her breath and feeling her life in her hands, dropped noiselessly on to the roof beneath.

She paused for an instant to collect her courage. Not safe yet—oh no! but outside the prison-bars at any rate—and looking down with thankfulness she saw that the outhouse sloped gradually to the low stone wall which separated the courtyard from the road. Another light spring and she has gained the wall—yet one more and Lettice stands free in the desolate Scotch road.

Not another house in sight, not a signpost or stone even to tell whither the road ran, or roads rather, for branching right and left of the cottage were two other roads leading—whither?

Which way should she take? Which way had she travelled that very afternoon,

which seemed now such long ages ago, so much had she lived through as she listened and lay on the floor? The fresh soft wind fanned her cheek, her brown hair had fallen down as she made her last spring and now hung low to her waist, her pretty archery dress showed oddly in the weak changing moonlight, and her silver belt gleamed and sparkled.

Lettice knelt down on the wide flinty road. "O God!" she said, "I'm all alone and don't know which way to turn; please show me."

A little bird started out of a stunted hawthorn by the roadside and flew straight in front of her. Lettice hailed it as an omen. With a joyful cry she sprang forward to follow it. "Ah," she said to herself, "I'm sure it came in answer to my prayer; that *must* be the way to Rosneath."

Poor child! She did not know her little feet were swiftly and surely bearing her in an exactly opposite direction.

CHAPTER IV.

"AS A WHITE DOVE."

It was not until at least two hours after Lettice's departure with Captain M'Cormack that her absence was discovered. If Miss Lilla M'Cormack had been a veritable prophetess or a professional clairvoyante she could not have more accurately described the state of consternation that ensued at Lochiel, and the line of conduct each individual chose to adopt.

The Misses Tremarten had retired to the dressing-room that Lord Lochiel had provided for their comfort at five o'clock. Their maid, who also acted as Lettice's for the day, was to be dismissed at six to wait on the young lady, and it was not until she returned with the alarming disclosure that Miss Lettice's room was vacant that any inquiry was made. Then it was that Ellis (Captain M'Cormack's man), when he saw the maid running hither and thither, asking every one if they knew where her young lady was to be found, came forward and made his statement.

"Captain M'Cormack desired his compliments to Miss Tremarten, and he had driven Miss Lettice Tremarten over to Ingleside that afternoon." Then the man, having sent this message up to the ladies, made his escape as rapidly as possible, returning to Ingleside, there to carry out Captain M'Cormack's further orders.

The maid went up to her mistress with the message, and, as Lilla had prophesied, Aunt Judith went into hysterics immediately, thereby considerably adding to Aunt Rosamond's distress and perplexity.

"If you would only keep quiet, Judith," she said, when the sobbing began to subside a little, "I could think what we had better do."

"Do!" said the emotional lady in her highest key, "send for Lord Lochiel, send for Lady Elizabeth Mackreth" (this was Lord Lochiel's half-sister, who was acting hostess for the time being), "telegraph to Owen, telegraph——"

"Hush, Judith, for Heaven's sake don't make any more noise. Do you think I want every one in the house to know of my niece's follies and indiscretions? Here, Matthews" (this to her maid), "go to Lady Elizabeth's maid and tell her to say to her mistress that

the Misses Tremarten (all three, mind) are a little fatigued and beg to be excused from dinner, but they will join the dance in the course of the evening. Then come back to me."

The maid took her message, and came back bringing Lady Elizabeth's regrets, &c.

"Now," said Aunt Rosamond, "go down to Williams" (this was the coachman who had driven them to Lochiel from Rosneath) "and tell him to go at once to Ingleside, where Miss Lettice has been spending the afternoon with Miss M'Cormack, and tell him to wait for her and bring her back as quickly as possible."

So the maid went and despatched the man, and Aunt Rosamond employed the two hours and a half occupied in his going and returning by endeavouring to soothe her sister's nerves and to account satisfactorily to herself for her niece's absence.

"It is only her utter ignorance that makes her transgress in this way," she argued. "If she had had a mother she would have learnt all these matters with her alphabet. It all comes from the eccentricities of her education. No doubt that fast, strong-minded young woman" (meaning Lilla) "sent her brother over to fetch her on a sudden

freak. They have forgotten how the time has passed while they have been gossiping and flirting, and will be thankful enough when Williams arrives to help them over the difficulty of getting home."

This was all very plausible, and Aunt Rosamond repeated the same arguments over and over again till she had almost succeeded in persuading herself into believing them. As for Miss Judith, she sat silent, rocking herself and shaking her head, for although she could not bring herself to contradict her sister even on so important a matter as this, she naturally took the sentimental and emotional view of the case, and concluded in her own mind that Lettice and Captain Ivie had eloped.

But when Williams returned with the startling announcement that "Miss M'Cormack had left that morning on a visit to friends at Perth, and that Captain Ivie was to drive with her as far as Auchterarder, but had not as yet returned," even Aunt Rosamond began to feel that matters had taken a serious turn.

"I don't believe a word of it," she said as the maid gave her the man's message. "This is some trick on Miss M'Cormack's part. Judith, if you go off into hysterics

again I shall lock you in by yourself till you come to!" (this severely to her sister.) "Heavens! I must consult some one—not Lord Lochiel; certainly not. Matthews, go to Mrs. Rosneath and ask her if she will be so very kind as to come to me here for five minutes, but be sure not to give her the message till she's quite alone."

It was now about nine o'clock in the evening; dancing had commenced, and the absence of Miss Lettice Tremarten, who was supposed to be the belle of the ball, was being very freely commented upon. Lord Lochiel, not satisfied with his sister's explanation of the matter, had commissioned one of the servants to make special inquiries on his own part as to the young lady's health and whether there was a possibility of her so far overcoming her fatigue as to join the dancers, and Mrs. Rosneath had just expressed her intention of going personally to inquire for the Misses Tremarten when Aunt Rosamond's message was brought to her.

"What is it, what is it, my dear friend?" she exclaimed in genuine alarm and anxiety as she entered Aunt Rosamond's room.

"Now don't you make a fuss, there's a good creature," said Aunt Rosamond, "or else I shall regret having sent for you.

Nothing serious has happened, only Lettice went out this afternoon and hasn't returned." Even now she would try to screen her niece, and couldn't bring herself to mention Captain M'Cormack's name in conjunction with hers. "I've sent to Ingle-side, thinking perhaps she might have gone over to see Miss M'Cormack, and now I want you to send some one over to Rosneath to see if any freak has taken her there, and then will you be so very kind as to say to all who ask after her that she has sprained her ankle severely, and regrets that she cannot dance to-night?"

But all the time the brave old lady talked so calmly and held her head so high she was saying in her own heart—"I know she has run away, I know she has run away. Oh, if we can only get her back without a fuss!"

Mrs. Rosneath looked very grave.

"I fear you are taking matters too lightly, Miss Tremarten," she said. "You ought to take some one into your counsel. You must at least allow me to tell my husband."

And Mr. Rosneath, when he was told, looked graver still, and suggested that Lord Lochiel should be consulted on the matter. This, however, Aunt Rosamond positively forbade.

"I want two or three things done, Mr. Rosneath, but if you are going to make a fuss and tell every one in this way, I must get some one else to do them for me," said the old lady irritably.

"You may command me to any extent, Miss Tremarten," said Mr. Rosneath, somewhat coldly it must be owned.

"Very well, then, my own belief is that the M'Cormacks know something about this" (this was the utmost she could bring herself to admit), "and I think some one should go there at once and question that man (Captain M'Cormack's groom, I believe) who gave a message to my maid, and get out of him exactly what he knows on the matter."

"That shall be done, Miss Tremarten—I will go myself. Your next wish?"

"I next want a telegram sent to Lettice's father to come here at once. Can that be managed to-night?"

"I fear not," replied Mr. Rosneath, "for every station far and near has been closed more than an hour ago, and not even a luggage-train will pass through till five in the morning, or we might have signalled that to stop and carry a message. What else is it you wish done?"

"Why, I want every one in the house to

be told that Lettice sprained her ankle severely after the archery this morning, and consequently cannot move off her bed, and I don't want anybody to be coming up and down fussing after us. I've locked Judith and old Matthews up together in the next room, and there they'll stay till the morning. It's the only way to keep them quiet."

"I will leave this last matter in Mrs. Rosneath's hands. I've no doubt she'll do her best to prevent inquiries, but I'll go at once to Ingleside and see the man you refer to." And without further delay he set off.

Two more hours of painful suspense passed. How Aunt Rosamond lived through them she scarcely knew, for in spite of the brave face she put upon it her heart inwardly misgave her. She had not dined, and for a woman at her time of life this is a serious matter, and she dared not release her maid to send her even for a cup of tea for fear of any indiscretion on her part.

Ever and anon there would come a louder moan from Miss Judith in the adjoining room, and Matthews would tap at the intermediate door and "beg Miss Tremarten to come in to her."

"No," Aunt Rosamond replied, "I shan't

go in and you shan't come out, either of you. Give her some vinegar."

So the time wore away. Once Lady Elizabeth Mackreth sent up to inquire for the ladies, and Aunt Rosamond answered in person that they were all quite well and had all gone to bed, or "at least going," she added in answer to the servant's look of amazement.

At a little before midnight Mr. Rosneath returned, tired with his long ride and with a very grave look on his face.

"I've come at once to you, Miss Tremarten," he said, glancing down at his dusty boots and coat, "but I have no good news to bring; indeed, I fear matters have taken a very serious turn."

"You've seen that man?" asked Aunt Rosamond, palpitating all over.

"Yes, I've seen him, and forced him to confess a great deal. At first he was very loath to speak, and repeated over and over again that Captain M'Cormack had sent him with the message that Miss Lettice had driven with him to Ingleside, and he had nothing more to tell; however, I threatened him, and I believe succeeded in frightening him, for it ended with his admitting that he knew that Captain M'Cormack and Miss

Tremarten started for Perth at four this afternoon, and that most probably by this time they are on their road to London."

"I don't believe it," said Aunt Rosamond in low unsteady tones, turning very white as she spoke.

Mr. Rosneath made no reply. They were standing in front of a gilt-framed mirror, and, glancing into it, he was struck by the sudden look of age which had passed over the lady's face.

"Mr. Rosneath," said she, speaking in the same low, unsteady tones, "what can be done?"

"I fear, nothing until the morning. It is useless to attempt to organise a party in pursuit at this time of night, with the moon setting and no telegraph-wires to be got at. If you will allow me to consult Lord Lochiel and——"

"But that I will *not* allow," said Aunt Rosamond with emphasis. "We must wait now until we see what the morning will bring."

And while Aunt Rosamond and Mr. Rosneath were consulting together, with grave faces and foreboding hearts, Lettice's weary little feet were stumbling along the hard white road which led she knew not

whither. Oh! if there were but a living soul anywhere to be found—tramp, gipsy, what you will, or finger-post, or landmark of any sort to tell her whither her steps were wandering! O for the gleam of a cottage light or the shadow of some friendly roof-tree—anything that held out the hope of some rest and refuge, for her strength was flagging now, and she felt as though she could not hold out much longer.

And then the moon went down.

The wind blew colder as the darkness gathered about her.

“Oh! will the morning never come?” sighed poor Lettice, as on and on she went more slowly now, for her feet were aching and sore. “Is it only the wind that I hear?” she said, pushing back her hair from her ears and standing still for an instant in a gloomy narrow lane into which the flinty high road had gradually dwindled. Then her heart misgave her as a loud gust swept over her head, scattering some dry leaves from the wayside trees, and bringing with it a few large drops of rain.

Dark shadows all round her, a grey stone wall on either side, the wind going and coming in heavy gusts, and sobbing itself out in the old firs. No hat on her head,

her feet blistered, and every nerve in her body burning and thrilling, on she went, stumbling at times, almost staggering against the flinty outline of the wall, now the only guide she had to keep her in the path which led she knew not whither. She dared not stop to rest—she knew if once she sat down by the roadside she would never rise up again. Her brain was sick and dizzy; she could not think, she scarcely felt, was hardly conscious, indeed, of her own self, her own being, in that windy, drizzling darkness.

And then, somehow, mingled with the wild sighing of the wind there came the baying of a dog. Whence the wind brought it she did not know.

“If I am going farther from it I must still keep on,” she thought to herself, so she staggered and stumbled on, catching her breath as the breeze swept by. “If I keep on and on,” she thought, “the day must dawn some time or other, and then some people must be about, and they’ll find me and help me along to get somewhere.”

Another wild gust of wind swept down, and again sounded the baying of the dog. “Ah, thank God!” sighed poor Lettice, “I’m not wandering away from it, after all.” And this—what was this soft grey

light gradually spreading among the night clouds and marking the line of the pebbly path under her feet? Can it really be the day dawning at last? can that dim, dark outline in the far distance be the grand old Auchterils? Ah, now the rugged stone walls begin to show brown and grey, the low-lying fields take shape and distinctness. A pool of water shines silvery and ghost-like almost at her feet, with a few slender trees grouped about, and there a little to the right of it, almost hidden by the luxuriance of the hedge in which it stands, is a small low gate. The dog is baying loudly now as Lettice stumbles forward and swings it back. A neat little two-storied house stands in front of her, and then—all is darkness and dimness again, for Lettice has fallen senseless on the gravel path.

But kind friends are at hand. The dog has roused the small household, strong arms are round her, and a young girl and an old man are at her side.

“Dinna be afraid, my dear,” said a gentle voice from under a red handkerchief which had been hastily tied over grey locks—
“dinna be afraid, my dear, ye’re among friends. I am the minister, do you ken? and this is my daughter Maggie.”

And exactly at the time they were carrying Lettice into the manse between them the woman M'Kenzie was knocking at the door of her little cottage to rouse Captain M'Cormack and his sister. Ivie started up with an anathema. "This is 'daybreak' with a vengeance," he exclaimed. Then he opened the door to admit the woman, and hastened upstairs to rouse Lilla.

"They'll soon bring your horse round," he explained. "You know you want to be off and away before she wakes."

They were interrupted by a knock at the bedroom door and a torrent of broad Scotch from the woman M'Kenzie, who stood outside on the landing holding in her hand a small silver brooch.

Captain Ivie took it from her. "Is this yours, Lilla?" he said, holding it out to her. As he did so it flashed through his mind that he had seen the tiny ornament before. Could it have been in Lettice's dainty green and silver dress as they drove along the road to Ardvaroch? "Where did you find it?" he demanded of the woman.

The woman indicated the yard at the back of the house with her hand, and commenced her explanation.

Ivie did not wait to hear it. With a whole

world of doubt and suspicion in his mind he rushed to Lettice's door and knocked loudly.

No reply.

He repeated the knocking, and then, unable longer to restrain his impatience, with a wrench and a crack he forced back the rotten lock and woodwork of the door, and entered the room. Lilla followed him.

Captain Ivie stood transfixed. "Where—where has she gone?" he stammered, gazing round him vacantly.

Lilla began to recover herself. "Well, I should say back to Lochiel if she has any sense in her head. Anyhow, it's all up with you, Ivie, and no mistake this time. I suppose it's *saue qui peut* now. I shall go on to Perth to the Lodgers', and simply deny the whole affair from beginning to end. I wash my hands of you and your misdeeds utterly for the future." And she left the room to hasten on her preparations for starting.

Ivie still stood motionless as though he did not hear her. Another dread was beginning to force itself upon him. What if the poor little thing had not returned to Lochiel? Something, no doubt, had aroused her suspicions overnight and she had taken flight, but how could she, alone and un-

directed in the dark, find her way over the fifteen miles which separated Ardvaroch from Lochiel? What if she had wandered out of the road or met with some misadventure? It was too horrible to think of. "Lilla may cry *sauve qui peut* if she will," he said aloud. "I know I'm black as the devil himself, but I'm not quite black enough for that."

He went down to Lilla.

"I'm going at once to the inn where M'Kenzie is, and will tell them to send round my cart with Dido and Daniel for you. I shall take Donegal and ride over to Lochiel and see if she is there all right."

"You are mad!" screamed Lilla after him. But he took no heed and went.

How Aunt Rosamond lived through that terrible night of suspense she did not know. Mrs. Rosneath kindly offered to sit up with her.

"No," said the old lady resolutely, "if you'll only be kind enough to let everything go on as usual. We are supposed to be shut in for the night. Well, let us be shut in, and to-morrow no doubt something will occur to show us what we ought to do. Only make every one believe Lettice is laid up with a sprained ankle."

Next came Lady Elizabeth Mackreth, very solicitous, as became a hostess, and wishful to see Lettice and say good night.

"I dare not disturb her" ("Heavens! I've told enough lies for her!")—this in her own heart), "and I fear I must say good-bye as well as good night, Lady Elizabeth, for I know we shall have to start so very early to-morrow, before you will be down. We leave Mrs. Rosneath's to-morrow *en route* for Paris or Wales, I'm not quite sure which." Lady Elizabeth looked politely surprised. "Lettice will be so sorry," continued Miss Tremarten, "but I fear it must be. Good night."

Lady Elizabeth went away with the impression that her guest was slightly deranged. She had not known Miss Tremarten very long nor very intimately, and was quite at a loss to understand her extraordinary behaviour on this occasion.

Poor Aunt Rosamond! She knew perfectly well that her structure of lies was built upon a very shallow foundation, and that sooner or later it must crumble into dust, but nevertheless she resolved that while she could she would do what she could for this niece of hers who had brought her so much anxiety and heartache.

And with the morning there came a very great and welcome surprise to Aunt Rosamond, which was nothing more nor less than the appearance of Dr. Herron on the scene. Miss Tremarten had just released her sister and Matthews, after ascertaining that they were in a more reasonable and calmer state of mind, and was consulting with them as to the possibility of arousing the Rosneaths and commencing the day's work of telegraphy and inquiry which she knew was before her, when a servant brought a message that Dr. Herron was below and wished to see her.

"Dr. Herron!" exclaimed the old lady joyfully. Under other circumstances she would have wished him, to say the least, in another hemisphere, but with this accumulation of responsibility upon her shoulders she was ready almost to fall down and worship him.

"Let him come up at once," she said. "Now, Judith, be calm, I beg; don't interrupt us, or else I shall lock you and Matthews up together again. Matthews, stay where you are; I won't trust you out of my sight."

Dr. Herron entered, frank and honest-looking as ever, although perhaps a little graver than when Lettice last said good-bye

to him in the flower-garden of her pleasant country home.

He quickly explained his unexpected arrival.

"Mr. Tremarten was very uneasy after receiving your last letter," he said to Aunt Rosamond, "and could not understand why, if there were any cause for anxiety on your part with regard to the insulting attention paid by Captain M'Cormack to Miss Tremarten, she could not return home at once. He did not at all approve of your plan of taking her for a long trip through Europe and America; he did not at all like the idea even of her coming here for the archery *fête* after the impertinent manner in which you have been annoyed and followed. He did not feel equal (his health has not been good lately) to the long journey so far North, and I as an old friend volunteered to come in his stead, and express more fully than could be done by letter his wishes respecting his daughter. By dint of rapid travelling I arrived at Perth late last night, could get nothing on wheels to bring me on, so was compelled to wait till daybreak. Before the sun was up I was, and here I am."

In all this Dr. Herron was scarcely so honest and plainspoken as was his wont. If

he had told the simple, unvarnished truth, it would have run somewhat in this fashion:—

“I have suffered agonies of torment ever since I heard that scoundrel M'Cormack was on friendly terms with your niece, and the torment reached its culminating point when your last letter told us of his daring to follow you here to Scotland. I said to Mr. Tremarten, ‘There is much behind all this, or why should they be so anxious to carry her off for a tour round the world? That archery *fête* may bring matters to a crisis, and Heaven only knows what will follow. Look here, Mr. Tremarten, if you can stay here quietly while mischief is being done I can't. You've not been particularly strong lately, and are scarcely fit to travel. I would like the journey, and if you'll allow me will start at once.’”

However, Aunt Rosamond had too much on her mind at that moment to criticise Dr. Herron's forms of expression very closely, and was only too thankful to welcome him as a friend in this her sore necessity.

“Dr. Herron,” she said very gravely, “I have a sad story to tell you. God knows I've been telling lies enough since last night, but to you, at any rate, I will tell the simple

truth." And she told it in all its sadness from beginning to end.

No one interrupted the old lady ; she told her story her own way in a simple, direct fashion. Once or twice her voice quivered and she seemed to choke down a sob in her throat, and once only Aunt Judith gave a slight moan from the sofa where she sat, and then looked nervously towards her sister, expecting an instant sharp reproof.

Dr. Herron did not move a muscle as he stood listening in front of Aunt Rosamond, but the veins stood out ominously on his broad forehead, and his fingers were clenched into his hand with the force of the restraint he put upon himself.

Then he spoke very quietly. "Miss Tremarten, some one else has been telling lies here besides you. You are making a great mistake in believing the infamous story that has been told you. Lettice may be wilful, Lettice may be wild, but elope with that scoundrel she could not. She will come out of this purer than ever. We won't waste time going over old ground ; we will——"

But Dr. Herron's sentence is not to be finished. There is another rap at the door, and the servant brings in a telegram, which

Aunt Rosamond opens hurriedly, reads with one glance, and then falls back in her chair half-unconscious for the thrill of joy that bounds through her heart.

This is what she read:—

“From Andrew Forbes,

“The Manse, Loanhead.

“Your puir lassie is safe and under my roof.”

Dr. Herron picked up the telegram and read it through.

“Thank God!” he said, drawing a long breath. “I will go to her at once, and if well enough will bring her back here with me.”

Were the surprises and interruptions of that morning never to end? There is another rap, and this time it is Captain M’Cormack who wishes to see Miss Tremarten.

“How dare he!” exclaimed Aunt Rosamond, aflame with anger. “Dr. Herron, what shall I do with him?”

“Serve him as you did your sister last night,” growled the doctor. “Lock him up somewhere till I come back. I can’t stop to settle accounts with him now.”

“Lock him up?” repeated the lady.

"Where can I put him? There's only the observatory"—a small round tower built out from the castle parapet—"There's a big key in the door too," added the old lady reflectively, "but however am I to get him there?"

"Send down word that you wish to see him in the observatory. First have the big key put on the outside. Then, when he's fairly in, go up the stairs yourself, lock him up, and put the key in your pocket."

"Ah," said Aunt Rosamond, "that's something worth doing. Judith, be quiet!" Judith was again laughing and sobbing on the sofa. "Dr. Herron, one moment." The doctor paused on the threshold. "Will it be possible to get Lettice back here in the dark somehow?—smuggle her in without any fuss?"

"I don't think it would," answered Dr. Herron, "and I don't think it would be worth while trying either."

"But," pursued the lady, "you see I've told so many lies one way or another already, and I really don't know how to account for it all without connecting Lettice's name with Captain M'Cormack's unless I make up another little story."

"Tell the simple truth, Miss Tremarten,

when you know what it is," was Dr. Herron's parting advice, "and see who'll come out of it blackest—Lettice or Captain M'Cormack."

Then he went down to Lord Lochiel to explain his appearance at the castle and to ask for a horse or some means of conveyance to the manse at Loanhead.

It was midday when Dr. Herron arrived at the quiet little parsonage. Miss Maggie Forbes, a gentle-looking, soft little maiden of about Lettice's own age, met him at the door, rightly guessing the object of the doctor's visit. "She's lying down now in the little parlour where we laid her this morning," she said. "She has been asleep for hours, and lies so still I'm almost frightened when I look at her. Please come in."

Dr. Herron went in.

The room was small and but scantily furnished, for the good old pastor had not much money to spend upon the refinements or luxuries of life. A high narrow book-case, flanked by a spindle-legged square table, were the first things that caught the eye on entering. A faded green carpet covered the floor, and long muslin curtains hung on either side of the somewhat low

window, which was still further shaded by hanging creepers and a balcony full of plants.

A large old-fashioned sofa stood against the wall sideways to the light, and on this, with a good supply of pillows and a warm striped rug thrown over her, lay Lettice in a calm sweet sleep.

"As a lily among thorns, as a white dove among crows," was or might have been Dr. Herron's thought as he looked down on the pure pale face. She slept so lightly she scarcely seemed to breathe. Of course the bright brown hair was tumbling all over the face, and half veiled the neck and arms besides; one little hand supported her head, the other lay outside on the bright-coloured rug. Dr. Herron instinctively and professionally put his two fingers on the wrist.

"She'll likely have an illness," said Miss Maggie, anxiously looking up in the doctor's face.

"She'll likely have no such thing," said Dr. Herron indignantly. "She's too young and healthy for that. All she'll want will be some long quiet hours of sleep and some good nourishing food directly she wakes."

As he spoke a rosy flush of colour passed over Lettice's face, there was a slight flutter-

ing of her breath, and she opened her eyes. Her gaze wandered from Dr. Herron to Maggie, and thence round the small room with its faded furniture.

Gradually the recollection of the terrors of the past night came back to her mind, and she shuddered and closed her eyes, as though she would shut them out from her sight.

Dr. Herron bent over her.

"You see, Lettice," he said, taking possession of her hand, "I was so tired of waiting for an answer to my letter (written no matter how long ago) that I have come myself in person to beg for it."

"How very undignified!" said Lettice. "It looks almost like being in a hurry."

"Then it looks like exactly what it is," replied Dr. Herron, thankful to hear the old ring in Lettice's voice and to see the old sparkle in her eye; "but we won't have any talking just yet, please. I want you to have some good food and another long sleep, and then perhaps to-morrow or next day we can begin the journey back to Wales."

Lettice made no reply, and closed her eyes once more. It was all so unreal to her, like some delicious dream almost, as it might

be a falling asleep in purgatory and an awakening in paradise.

But before Dr. Herron returned to Lochiel that evening he had much to hear, and, self-contained and calm-tempered man as he was, he found it difficult to restrain his indignation and anger as Lettice told simply and plainly the whole story of the M'Cor-macks' treachery and falsehood. Dr. Forbes and his daughter were present at the time by Dr. Herron's express wish, "for," he argued wisely enough, "the story, in one form or another, will be sure to be spread about the country, and it is as well you should hear the real facts of the case from the young lady's own lips."

"To think it should be the very same captain after all, father," sobbed poor Maggie in her father's arms, after Dr. Herron had gone, and Lettice had been comfortably settled in Maggie's own room for a good night's rest. "The very same captain, father, I know, because I showed Miss Tremarten the photograph he gave me, and she said he was the very same captain. And father" (this in a very low whisper), "I'm not at all in love with him now, and never, *never* want to see him again."

"Then thank the guid Lord that your

eyes are opened, my child," replied the old pastor, "and another time be sure not to give away your heart till you get something for it in return. Something for nothing is never the way to bring grist to the mill," concluded the old Scotchman sententiously.

The day which had passed so pleasantly for Lettice and Dr. Herron at the manse had been trying in the extreme to Aunt Rosamond. Hide it as she would, the suspense and anxiety of the past twenty-four hours had told upon her terribly. If she had been equal to it she would have gone off with the doctor to fetch back her niece, but after the over-night's vigil she felt it was perfectly useless to attempt so long a journey.

"If I had screamed like you, Judith, or cried like you, Matthews, I daresay I should not have felt it so much," said the old lady to her sister after Dr. Herron had started; "but as it is, my only outlet has been a number of small lies, which I daresay have done as much harm as good. You and I, Judith, I am bound to say, cut a very poor figure in the whole affair. We first take this girl away from her father, in order to save her from an entanglement with a country doctor next let her carry on a flirtation under our

very eyes with a disreputable captain, and then suffer the country doctor to come upon the scene again to save her from the afore-said captain. Now I ask you, mightn't the doctor just as well have had her at first without all this fuss?"

Judith opened her eyes in amazement.

"Indeed," she said humbly, "I thought you really wanted the girl to come to London. I didn't urge it——"

"Now don't argue, Judith," said Aunt Rosamond; "you don't do it well. You've no reasoning powers whatever. There is no satisfaction to be got out of the affair from beginning to end, except—yes, perhaps—a little. Matthews, did you put the large key on the outside of the observatory door?"

Matthews answered in the affirmative, and without another word Miss Tremarten took her way up the steep narrow steps which led to the castle observatory.

It was situated at an angle of the building, and was simply a large square room which had been built out by a former earl who had developed astronomical instead of agricultural tendencies. It had been out of use for more than a generation, and had served at different periods as a receptacle for

lumber of various kinds, such as old pictures and antique furniture, which had no special interest for the present earl, and one or two worn-out musical instruments. These with some large old-fashioned telescopes in different stages of dilapidation constituted the sole furniture of the room.

It certainly struck Captain M'Cormack as very odd that Miss Tremarten should select this out-of-the-way little corner of the house for their interview. There was a damp, unused smell too about the room as he entered which struck him as far from agreeable, and accordingly he went to the rather narrow window, which he succeeded in opening, and leaned out. There was, as might be imagined, a splendid view from this height not only of the castle grounds but also of the surrounding country. Captain Ivie, however, "did not go in for that sort of thing," as he had more than once phrased it to his intimate friends, and at the present moment his mind could hold but one thought—where was Lettice? what had become of her? In fact, he could not have looked at a printed map of the world with more indifference than he gazed upon the magnificent panorama which surrounded Castle Lochiel. "Of course I shall come out of

all this very badly," he thought to himself as he leaned out. "Everything will look very black against me, and how in Heaven's name I'm to float along is more than I can tell. Still if I could only know that no harm had come to her through me it would be a sort of consolation after all——" His soliloquy was cut short by the sudden shutting of the heavy oak door behind him with a loud bang. "Ah!" he thought, "it was my opening the window—strange, too, I didn't feel a current." His amazement, however, was increased when he heard the creak of the key in the lock and realised that he was locked in. At first he imagined it must be one of the servants in passing, who, seeing the door open and not knowing he was there, had pulled it to and locked it. Then as he began to think over the strangeness of the whole affair it suddenly flashed across his mind that for some purpose or other he had been literally trapped and caged. His anger knew no bounds; at first he stamped, called vehemently, shook the door and beat it violently with anything and everything that came to hand—an old chair till it split in two, and a rotten violin till that too succumbed to the strength of the oak. Then as it occurred to him that whoever

had shut him in was probably at hand to enjoy his discomfiture and anger, he subsided a little and took a calm survey of the situation. Were there any means of escape by the window? and again he leaned out, and this time with still less inclination to enjoy the landscape. No, not even a ledge; it was just a little jutting square room built out from the castle parapet, nothing above it save a turret with some ornamental slits, nothing beneath till one came to the castle grounds a hundred feet or so below.

"Well, I suppose there is nothing for it but to grin and bear it," he said to himself, feeling for his cigar-case as he spoke. But alas! even that consolation was to be denied him, for the cigar-case was comfortably reposing in the pocket of his overcoat, left behind at Ardvaroch in his hurried departure that morning.

"And this is the only satisfaction I have had out of the whole affair," said Aunt Rosamond to her sister as she laid the big key upon the table in her dressing-room. "I haven't enjoyed anything so much since I was a child and caught a big ugly spider which had trapped ever so many butterflies, and put him in a scent-bottle and corked him down. I feel now as if I had caught the

biggest and ugliest spider that ever was, and I don't think he'll be in a hurry to spin his webs again!"

Then the old lady called for her writing materials, and penned a short note to Lady Elizabeth Mackreth, begging her to excuse the absence of herself and sister for the day, and asking her to suspend all judgment upon the oddity of her proceedings until the return of Dr. Herron in the evening, when everything would be satisfactorily explained.

Lady Elizabeth showed the note to her brother.

"Really," she said, "I think a little explanation is due to us."

"My dear Elizabeth," said Lord Lochiel, "I have had more than half an explanation already from Dr. Herron, and if I had known the young lady's affections were so far engaged I would not have pressed my attentions upon her as I did; and after all, as you said yesterday, she *is* very young for a man at my time of life, and, with settled tastes and pursuits such as mine, matrimony is not the absolute necessity it would be to a younger man."

And as evening drew near Aunt Rosamond began to have some misgivings as to the imprisonment of Captain Ivie.

"I think we had better let him out," she said to her sister. "I think if we can get him away from the castle before Dr. Herron comes back it would be as well. You see if Dr. Herron tries to thrash him he may object, and perhaps there will be murder done, and Lettice's name will be brought in again, and there'll be more fuss than there's been already."

So she gave Matthews the key and desired her to tell Captain M'Cormack that Miss Tremarten had sent her to let him out.

Matthews took the key with much misgiving at heart.

"Perhaps he'll knock me down when he comes out," thought the old body; "and the key's mighty heavy to turn; maybe 'twill break in the lock."

Matthews couldn't hear a sound as she listened outside the door of the observatory, for Captain Ivie had by this time subsided into something of dulness and apathy.

At the first creak, however, of the key in the lock he roused up. "Who the ——'s at the door?" he roared, introducing a strong noun.

"Now don't, there's a good soul," said poor old Matthews, "or you'll make me

tremble so I won't be able to turn the key."

"Take both hands," shouted the captain, "and do it quickly, or else by Heaven——"

"Now don't," said Matthews. "I'm shaking so already I don't know what to do with myself."

"There, don't shake," said Captain Ivie, fearing lest his liberator might be panic-stricken and take flight. "I'd give you a sovereign not to shake if I could get at you."

"Put it under the door," said Matthews.

Ivie did so, and Matthews somehow found strength and courage to turn the key.

"Miss Tremarten's compliments, sir, and she sent me up to let you out, for she thought you'd been locked in long enough," said Matthews, trembling.

"Where is Lord Lochiel?" asked Ivie. "They shall answer for this."

"In the drawing-room with the ladies," answered Matthews, glad to see the last of Captain M'Cormack.

To the drawing-room he went. A number of guests were assembled in the larger drawing-room variously occupied, and a little apart from the others sat Lady Elizabeth

engaged in conversation with Mrs. Rosneath. Lord Lochiel was not to be seen.

Ivie strode angrily into the room. "Where is Lord Lochiel?" he said, going up to Lady Elizabeth. "Lady Elizabeth, I've many times been your guest and your husband's——"

Lady Elizabeth looked up at him, ignored him, and continued her conversation with Mrs. Rosneath. "You were saying, Mrs. Rosneath——" Then, as Ivie stood there glaring at her, she said in Arctic tones, "I've no doubt you'll find Lord Lochiel in the library, Captain M'Cormack."

In the corridor outside the drawing-room Captain M'Cormack came upon Lord Lochiel and Dr. Herron.

Dr. Herron looked him full in the face. "As I was saying to you just now, Lord Lochiel," he said slowly and distinctly, "there are some curs on whom even a good thrashing is a waste of labour, and consequently other means have to be adopted to restrain their vicious propensities."

Ivie turned upon him.

"Have I to thank you, sir, for the insult put upon me to-day?"

"Most assuredly," replied Dr. Herron; "but thank Lord Lochiel, not me, if you

please, that you have been let off so lightly."

Lord Lochiel interposed, calling to a servant who stood near.

"Show Captain M'Cormack the way out," he said. "Captain M'Cormack, I have the honour to wish you good day."

"I shall call you to account for your words, sir," said Ivie in farewell thunder to Dr. Herron.

"By all means," replied the doctor, "only you must make haste about it, for I leave for Wales the day after to-morrow."

But somehow Captain Ivie thought better of it, and never did call Dr. Herron to account for his words.

And when "the day after to-morrow" came it found a motley gathering assembled on the up-platform of the little country station. In one corner stood Aunt Rosamond, a little worn and worried-looking still, perhaps, for the twenty-four hours of keen anxiety she had passed through, with Lord Lochiel at her elbow, for their kind-hearted host had insisted on coming down himself to see the last of his guests, even to the neglect of a local agricultural dinner, for which he had been preparing speeches and cattle-breeding statistics for the last fortnight. A few yards

from these two stood Miss Judith, in close converse with the old Scotch pastor, to whom the whole party felt somehow they owed a debt of gratitude impossible to discharge, and who had a quiet persistent way of putting on one side all attempts at thanks and acknowledgments one would hardly have expected from his gentle blue-eyed physique.

"If Lettice's father were here, Dr. Forbes," Miss Judith was saying in her high-pitched quavering voice (more quavering than ever now for the recent hysterics she had gone through)—"if he were here he would insist on——"

"If the father is at all like the daughter," interrupted Dr. Forbes, "he is very likely to win his own way to every one's heart. Look how she's got over my shy little lassie there. With their two heads so close together—plotting mischief, no doubt—one would think they had known each other for years instead of a short twenty-four hours."

He pointed as he spoke to Lettice, with Dr. Herron in attendance of course, who, side by side and hand in hand with Maggie, was chirping and twittering like any little bird in earnest low-voiced talk.

Lettice was looking bright and radiant and as full of smiles and dimples as ever. Never before had her brown hair seemed more crisp and curled and tangled, never before had her eyes shone more changefully with the depth of fun and happiness within. As for quiet, sedate Miss Maggie, her head was bent low, and, looking under her poke sun-bonnet, one could see the trace of a tear or two which Lettice's earnest and reiterated expressions of gratitude had somehow brought to the surface. Lettice noted them with one of those quick sidelong glances of hers, but didn't mind them in the least. She knew they didn't come from a sore heart now, and she knew too she could soon drive them away with her light talk and fun.

"Look at those aunties of mine," she began, stopping short in the midst of her farewell acknowledgments. "It is quite too shocking the way they are carrying on with those two middle-aged gentlemen. Why, Maggie, if you don't take care you'll be having Aunt Judie for a stepmother before you know where you are." Miss Maggie looked up aghast. "You may well look shocked, dear; I assure you those two aunts are a very great anxiety to me, and will be till

I can get some obliging creature who wears a coat and hat to take them off my hands. Such fun this morning, Maggie. I thought Lord Lochiel was going to make Aunt Rosamond an offer over the breakfast-table. I could see it in his face; and he did! But it was only a propitiatory offering after all, in the shape of a bull or young heifer which he thought papa might like to cross with a Welsh breed. You should have seen Aunt Rosamond's face as she tried to express her gratitude. 'I'm afraid my brother doesn't at all understand the mysteries of cattle-breeding. Beef, Lord Lochiel, in any shape or form, I could undertake—it would be only a question of packing—but a bull! What could we do with the thing when we put up in London for the night?' ”

Miss Maggie is rippling over with laughter now at Lettice's perfect reproduction of Aunt Rosamond's voice and manner. Here Dr. Herron joins in.

“ Yes, I don't quite see how it could have been managed. Matthews certainly might have charged herself with the bull's comforts if you young ladies had not seen fit to overload her in the way you have with a kitten and puppy-dog.”

He glances to the farther end of the plat-

form as he speaks, where stands poor old Matthews, the picture of patient endurance, with the nose of a tabby kitten peeping out of a black bag she holds in one hand, and grasping with the other a leathern lead which a small shaggy Skye is straining to its fullest extent. Both animals had been pets of Miss Maggie's, fallen in love with by Lettice, and presented to her by the former young lady as a token of enduring friendship.

Lettice turns upon him brightly. Depend upon it she has yet another arrow left in her quiver, and the doctor will have the benefit of it.

"Oh, Dr. Herron," she begins demurely enough, in the sweetest, softest whisper possible, "I had nearly forgotten. Do you know I had a letter from papa this morning?—such a letter! I really do think he and Mary have been flirting finely while we've been away, and *I* think they'll be married, and then, you know, *our* engagement must be broken off at once, because you'd be my uncle, and it would be quite too dreadful to marry one's uncle."

"Yes," replies Dr. Herron, "it would be quite too dreadful to marry one's uncle, and I don't see any way out of it, Lettice"

(this in an equally low voice, and looking down into the clear bright eyes), “unless *we* get married first, and then, if your papa likes to marry his own daughter-in-law—my sister that is—no one can have anything to say against it.”

And married first they accordingly were.

